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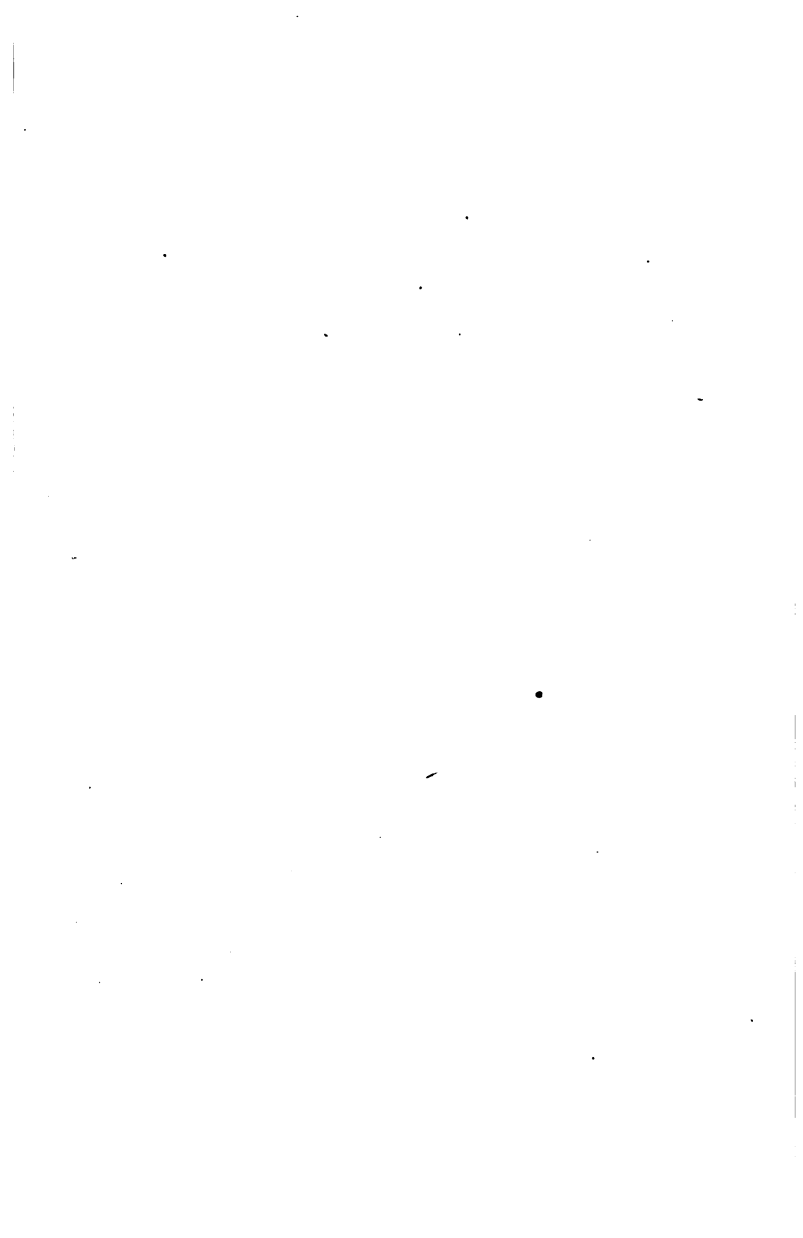
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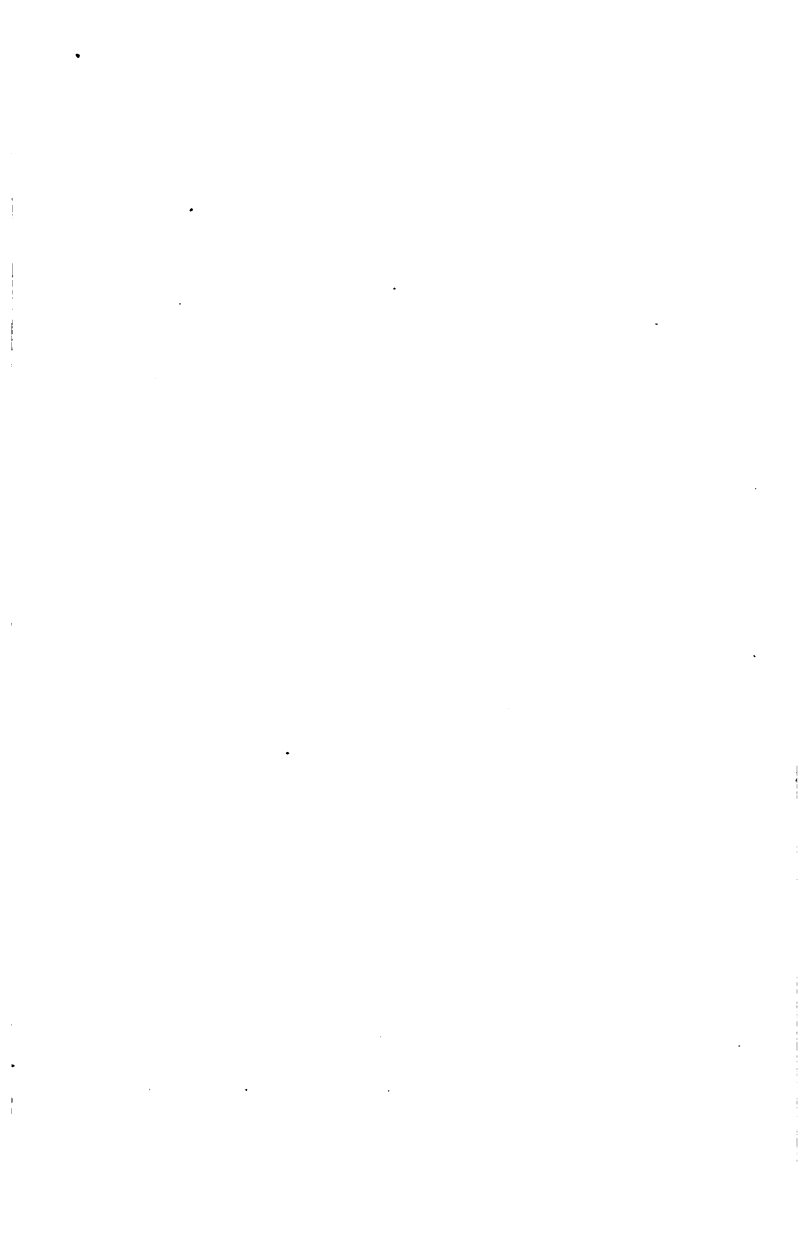
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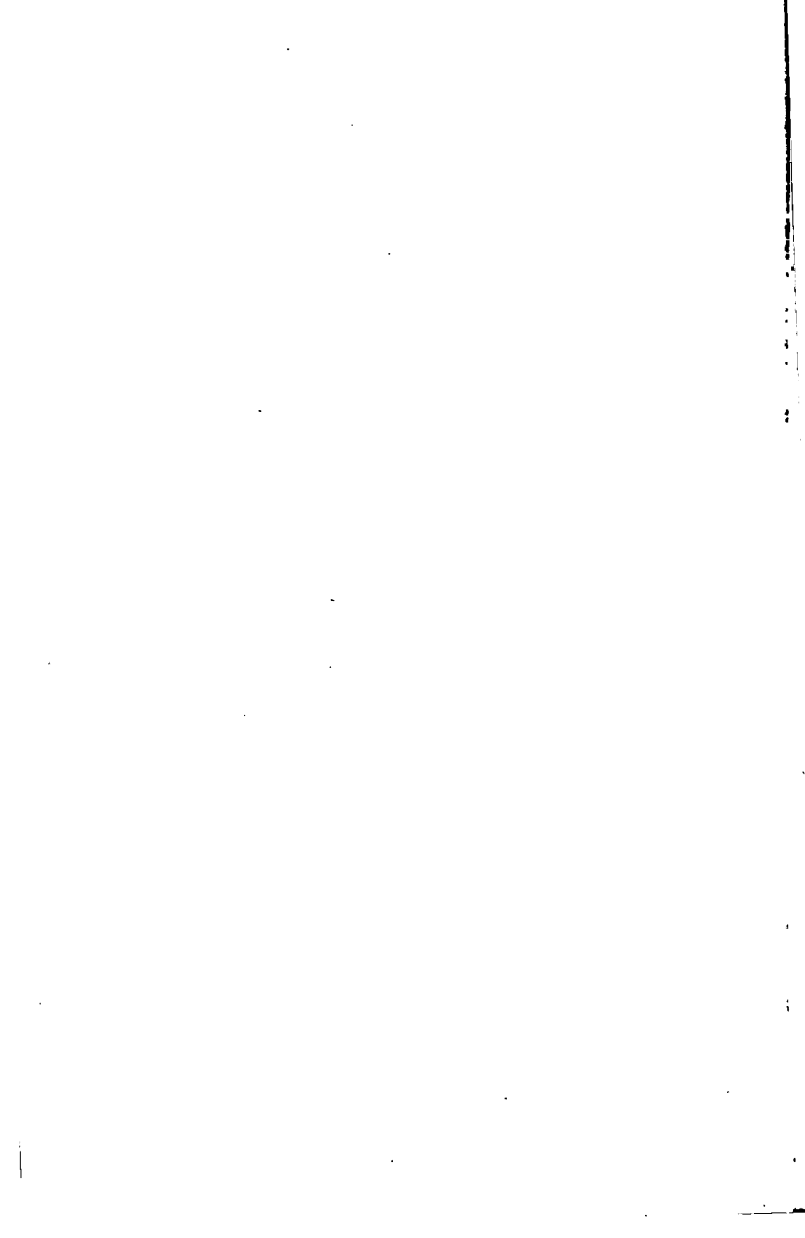
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A SUPERIOR WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

A ROSE AMONG THORNS.

THE bustle of departure was over. The sisters-in-law had driven off with their respective husbands, and Richard Thorne, with a long-drawn sigh, half disconsolate, half relieved, closed the door and returned to his library. He threw a fresh log on the fire and wheeled up his favorite arm-chair, into whose comforting recesses he sank with another sigh. This time the relief was predominant.

A cold, damp muzzle was thrust sympathetically into his hand, and he caressed the head of a large, very old mastiff.

"All gone; Bounce," he said. "Nobody left but you and me. Never mind, that's better than to have the wrong person, Bounce!"

Bounce tried to justify his name by a stiff frisk, which proved a signal failure. His master looked thoughtfully at the fire.

"Neither of those two shall be mistress here," he said half aloud. "Not in my day at least. Neither of them is fit to fill my mother's place. The very

thought is desecration! I wonder if there is any woman in the world who could do that, and if so, what kind Power is to show me who she is, and where?"

The door opened at that moment to admit first Dodge, a much younger and more active specimen of doghood, and, immediately following, a young and very graceful woman. She was dressed in a soft, noiseless, half-mourning garb, and the delicate oval of her face, and willowy slenderness of her figure, made up for the want of positive beauty; while the brightness of her dark eyes, and the lurking humor in the corners of her smiling mouth, gave promise of a most companionable nature. She came forward now with a roguish look, as Richard sprang up in amazement.

"You here, Rosamond!"

"Ah, you thought you had made a clean sweep and got rid of us all!" she said. "Poor Rick! No, don't give me your chair, I like to see you in it once again, and this low one suits me better."

She seated herself on the other side of the fire.

"I am surprised," he said, "but glad enough of the chance of a talk with you after all these weary days. Only how did it happen, Rosy? I thought you were to go with the others. Don't tell me that Walter and Charley are so lost—absorbed—absolutely besotted with matrimony as to forget *you*!"

"No, indeed, the dear boys!" answered Rosamond warmly. "When was either of them anything

but kindness itself? It happened very naturally. Charley, you know, was going to Temple Lodge for a day and night, quite out of my way, so he left me to Walter's care; and Louisa was very late. She had dropped a ring or something in her room, and the whole household was down on its knees, sprawling under beds, and moving tables, till the last moment. I would not let them take me, for I saw that even a moment's detention would make them lose their train."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated their host fervently.

"Amen! But, Richard, I am afraid you will have to walk home with me," she added, smiling — "Oh no, I forgot your foot. George will drive me over when the carriage comes back."

"Not unless you would prefer it. My foot is as well as ever, and you know I am glad enough to go with you if go you must." Then with a sudden horrified recollection he exclaimed, "But, good Heavens! who *was* in the carriage? I said good-by to *somebody*, with effusion! I pressed her hand! I promised to see her very soon!"

"O Richard, Richard!" cried Rosamond with a peal of laughter. "It was Louisa's maid! Thank you very much for the compliment! Did you — oh, *did* you — kiss her?"

He could not help laughing in spite of his annoyance.

"No," he answered, "I only wonder I did not. She sat quite far back, and had her veil down. That

saved me, no doubt! Possibly a lingering instinct that it would be my duty to offer a similar salute to the bride, came to my aid; but I shook hands most affectionately!"

"Fancy her disappointment at that empty greeting," cried Rose, with another soft peal of mirth.

"And how she must have searched the corners of her gloves and muff for the hoped-for coin! Oh, it is really quite too funny!"

"It is really quite too bad," he returned. "Don't begin to fidget, Rosamond. The fire is bright, and it is early still. Let us sit here awhile and criticise our guests, in the most approved style of hospitality."

"After all," said Rosamond, caressing the old dog, who had deserted his master on the moment of her arrival, "if the strict rule of loyalty to a departed guest were enforced, how could we ever have a comfortable gossip? This house has been for years such a centre of hospitality, that we scarcely have an acquaintance in the country who has not partaken of our salt."

"Has been!" he echoed sadly.

"And will be again, no doubt. All things are not of the past. Here, for instance, are two fresh beginnings. What do you think of your new sisters, Richard? Is not Eleanor lovely?"

"Lovely? Well, hardly that. She is very pretty, quite remarkably so, I confess; but —"

"She is *lovely*," said Rosamond decidedly. "I don't mean intellectual; I don't say she is witty or

strong-minded, or even very well educated. But she has a sweet nature, and a power of loving, quite beyond the common, and I think Charley may well worship her as he does, and be the very happy man he is."

"Well done, kind little advocate!" said Richard, looking at her with smiling eyes. "And I had found out nothing but that she was wonderfully pretty, totally uninteresting, and somewhat given to lapses in grammar!"

"O Richard, no!"

"Yes, indeed, I do assure you

'There are maidens fair as she
Whose nouns and verbs do more agree.'

"Now don't begin on a 'verbal' lecture. You know I am shaky myself, and you used to spend much wasted time in trying to reform me!"

"I do not think there is anything very heinous in your language," he answered. "You do not use the verb 'to ain't' like Nelly, or 'to was' as she sometimes does!"

"I *never* heard her!"

"I have. You are also good enough not to say 'he don't' as she constantly does. As for the old disputed phrase 'I won't,' I shall have to forgive you, and call your speech idiomatic rather than strictly correct, for I know you are incorrigible."

"Yes, I say still as I used when I was a child, 'I *won't* say will not!' But, at all events, even if

Nelly strays from the English of the purist into the paths of idiom or vernacular, there are not many 'maidens fair as she.' Much may be forgiven to such pretty lips."

"When Charley first wrote about her," said Richard, "I had it in my heart to ask him to bring her here to be mistress of this house. He could very easily live here and go into town by the morning train, and as he is not very well off, poor fellow, it would help him along. But I waited to see her, and it is well I did. She could never fill my mother's place."

"No, oh no!" said Rosamond. "But, Richard, if you wait for that —"

"I do wait for that," he said gravely.

Rosamond looked at her cousin with earnest sympathy. It grieved her to see how much the last two years of sorrow and loneliness had changed his appearance and clouded his spirit. His mother had been one of those rare, spontaneous, brilliant women, who seem to be almost as much sweethearts as mothers to their sons. Her instant comprehension, her unfailing sympathy, and the inspiration of her keen mind and large heart had filled his life with a companionship so real and so entire, that it was no wonder that in losing her, all the joy and fulness of existence seemed to have faded.

"And alas!" thought Rosamond. "Where will he ever replace her? There are none such women left!"

The other sons had been forced into exertion by the needs of daily life ; and their hungering longing for the mother who had been so dear, had led them both into early attachments and speedy marriage. Their elder brother regarded their conduct with mingled envy and disgust. With keen sad eyes he noted every point of inferiority in his new sisters, and marvelled to see their power to cheer and comfort the sons of a woman so infinitely above them in nature and cultivation.

For himself no necessity compelled. A fortune inherited from an uncle placed him beyond the need of work, except for work's sake, and enabled him to secure the old home from passing into strange hands, and to plan for himself the life of country leisure and occupation to which he felt himself attracted.

His mother's death came suddenly at a time when he was far away ; and returning from the Old World, full of remorseful regret that he had ever left her, he found the place so bare, so empty, that he had crossed the sea again, and only the feeling of being now head of the family, had drawn him homewards on hearing of his brothers' marriage plans. An accident on landing had kept him for weeks a prisoner to his sofa, far from the home which he almost dreaded to see again ; it seemed so unlike itself, without mother, brothers, or cousin.

Rosamond, her own heart orphaned by the same loss, felt for him the deepest sympathy. Hers had

been the privilege of nursing to the last the stricken form, sustaining with her own bright courage the flickering, fainting spirit. When she remembered those last hours, so precious in their sadness, the brave words of faith, the softly breathed petitions, the looks, the tones of priceless value to her memory, her heart ached anew for him, the best loved of all, — the eldest, the nearest, to whom these recollections could come only in the cold record of written words or broken explanations ending in tears.

He looked up now, surprised at her long silence, and met her wistful eyes.

“I do wait for that,” he repeated. “I cannot wish to have any one so utterly different, filling *her* place, sitting in her chair, sleeping in her bed, governing her good old servants.”

“No, of course not. But all the same, Richard, Aunty and Eleanor would have loved each other.”

“Do you think so? Then my opinion of my new sister is higher than it was. Still she is not, she never will be, a Superior Woman.”

He pronounced the words with a certain solemnity. To him they embodied his ideal of womanhood.

Rosamond laughed. She always laughed when he uttered this favorite phrase.

“How about Mrs. Walter?” she asked. “I am sure she is ‘superior’ enough!”

“Do not speak of her!” said her cousin with a shudder. “Poor Wat!”

There was a short silence, then Rose said, —

"Yes, she is pretty bad! But Walter does n't know it, and he never will. He is sure that he has won the prize among women. She is equally convinced of his good fortune, and neither will ever be undeceived, perhaps; at least I trust the glamour will never leave his eyes. I need not ask if you mean to invite *her* to live here!"

"Heaven forbid!" he ejaculated. "It is most fortunate that she has a fortune, and that Walter is better off than Charley. There can be no question of duty in their case. Walter is a dear fellow, a noble-hearted man, but he is taken in and done for now, no mistake about that!"

"Ah! If you had n't sprained your ankle at the time of the two weddings," said Rose, "you would n't have been so surprised now. I saw it all at the time, only each case was intensified. Little Nelly, all heart and flutter and tears,—forgetting everything she ought to do. Clinging, crying, to her mother at the last, as if it would kill her to be parted, and the next moment blushing and laughing, when Charley positively tore her away, and carried her to the carriage in his arms. It was quite a moving picture, I assure you, and she was very sweet!"

"Not very sensible to get up such a scene," was the grim reply.

"Perhaps not, but it seemed quite natural at the time: just like a child."

"She *is* a child," said the sterner brother-in-law.

"I dare say I am a little hard about this, Rosy, but I will *not* ask her to come here, and overturn all my home routine, and make havoc among my mother's precious possessions."

"My dear Richard," said Rosamond gravely. "There should be no question in your mind of such a thing. The boys are not needy. I hope if they were, they would both have had too much good sense and principle to marry. As for pretty little Nelly, she would not assume the responsibility you speak of, for the world! She will make a tiny nest of her own, and flutter about a good bit before she settles down into a rather rumped, but very downy, tender kind of existence. But for this house, it is yours, and yours only. No woman but one ought ever to be mistress here."

"I think so too," he answered, with a smile and a sigh. "But the question is, where is she, Rose?"

"Where, indeed!" said Rosamond, rallying her spirits. "Taking a course of Political Economy like Miss Marjoribanks; studying Greek and Syriac; deeply versed in sub-soil drainage, the Irish Home rule, and the spots upon the sun,—in short, every kind of virtue and wisdom! And when Time and her whole enlightened being are ripe for such an exalted destiny, your guardian angel, if you own such a thing, will conduct your steps to her studious sanctum, and the doom of both will be sealed!"

"*Doom*, indeed!" he replied. "How you love to tease, Rose. And how odious you make her!"

"Odious? Far from it. She is a Superior Woman!"

She rose as she spoke, and tied a soft knitted scarf over her glossy braids.

Richard got up reluctantly.

"I hate to have you go," he said. "It is almost reason enough to invite Louisa back again, if you would stay."

He wrapped her fur cloak about her with brotherly care, and drew her arm in his as they slipped forth into the crisp, cold night; for winter had come to them early. The snow crackled under their feet, and a glorious moon shone upon the ice-coated trees and hedges, which sparkled like a shower of diamonds. It seemed not earth, but fairy-land.

CHAPTER II.

CELEBS.

“O RICHARD, how beautiful!” exclaimed Rosamond. “What a night for a walk! My feet feel winged like Mercury’s! If you are only sure it won’t make you lame.”

“Really there is no danger, make your mind easy. I can’t say I feel wings sprouting in my boots, but the sprain is entirely well, I assure you.”

“I have not asked you about the other bride,” he went on. “Down, Bounce! Run ahead, Dodge. What a lark for the dogs that you did not drive home, Rose.”

“A lark for me! Good Bounce, what a kind old idiot you are, to bring your rheumatic bones out at this time of night! Yes, Rick, you missed a good deal in not attending Walter’s wedding. Louisa was a model bride, in attire, in beauty, in demeanor.”

“Beauty! You do not call *her* pretty!”

“*Pretty* does n’t describe her, but she looked wonderfully handsome at that supreme moment. Her family are not at all our sort of people, Richard. I am glad for Walter’s sake that they live in Chicago. By the way, Chicago itself was a delightful place,

and the people wonderfully kind. The Hemmings seem to know a nice set, too; their friends were more to my taste than they themselves. Everything was as gorgeous as money could buy, and as empty and stupid and unhomelike as you can conceive. And Louisa, though she posed so well for the part, was the presiding genius of the whole, directed every detail, and 'bossed the job' completely!"

"No weeping in *her* mother's arms, I suppose," remarked the unsympathetic brother.

"Oh, my dear! Her travelling dress would have been crushed by such a contact. Even Walter stood reverently aloof from its flounces! She leaned over very gracefully to embrace the different members of her quite unattractive, wonderfully attired sisterhood."

"*Sisters!* Poor Wat!"

"Three of them! One or two looked nice enough. The youngest is decidedly pretty, only over-dressed, and perhaps a little 'loud.'"

"Did the bride cry?"

"She put up a beautiful handkerchief to her eyes. I could n't see what was going on behind it. She ran back from the carriage for a moment, to tell them not to cut the second bridal loaf, but to send it after her by express."

"O Rosy, Rosy!" cried her cousin in horrified amusement. "Why did you never tell me about all this before?"

"I would n't forestall," said Rosamond. "Do you think I could be brought up by Aunt Gertrude, Richard, and not learn how to hold my tongue?"

"I know," he said, "that you are reticence itself in some things; far too much so. And now that I have you to myself, for the first time in all these many months, I am going to ask a few frank questions. What are you going to do? How do you mean to live, now that your money is gone, if you will not let your brothers help you and shelter you?"

"Don't say that! Both those dear good boys will have their hands full without me. I cannot live with them, and I won't live *on* them! They will have enough to do with their new homes and their wives, without poor relations clinging to their skirts!"

"*They!* Yes, perhaps. But is there nobody in the world but Wat and Charley for a 'poor relation,' as you call yourself, to turn to? Where am I? What have I done to hurt or offend you, that you throw me out of the question so cavalierly, Rosamond?"

She turned a little pale, but he was not looking at her. There was a short pause. Rosamond needed it to steady her voice and to wink away an unwelcome tear from her eyelashes: then she said, —

"Dear Richard, how can you speak so? Of course if I needed your help I would come to you, and accept it with the same pleasure and frankness with which it is, I well know, always ready for me."

“And do you *not* need it, dear? How can that be? You tell me that your home will be at Cleveland for the present. Why will you accept from a stranger what your own brothers are not allowed to give?”

He called himself her brother, and she had been brought up among them as a sister indeed; but the relationship was not in reality a very close one. She was the orphan child of a much-loved cousin of his mother, and so early adopted into the family that “the boys” hardly realized, until the time of change and separation came with their mother’s death, that the little girl who had been such a prize and pet in their rough, kindly childhood, had no very near claim upon their lives.

Rosamond answered eagerly, —

“I cannot let you think that, Richard! Mrs. Cleve is kindness itself, and I am sure would gladly let the long visit she urged me to make her grow into a settled home without any equivalent. But you know I could n’t do that. And we have finally settled upon this plan. I am to teach Mina and Tina, and spare her any further search after the governess she has been so long dreading. Don’t look so disapproving,” she added imploringly. “It will be pleasant work, Rick. I love the children, and I always liked to teach. And oh, you must know how much more comfortable I shall feel to earn a home, instead of only accepting it!”

“You know how I feel about that,” said her

cousin gravely. "And how little I can sympathize in your scruples about remaining at Thorncliff. If my mother had not died in entire ignorance as to your change of fortune, she would have done something to bind you to your home."

"Dear Richard, it is not only *les convenances*. It was too desolate without her and all of you."

"That I can imagine only too well. It is the very thing which has driven me away. But I hate the thought of your teaching. Does she give you nothing but your home?"

"Oh yes, indeed! I am to have a salary quite sufficient for my needs. Don't worry about me. It is really the best present solution of my perplexities, and I like dearly to be with Mrs. Cleve. She is so thoroughly bright and kind."

"She is very superior," enunciated her cousin.

"She is very *simpatica*, which is a hundred times better."

"Where is Cleve this winter?"

"He is just now at New Orleans, and will be at San Francisco later on. No hope of his being at home this year, I think. But we are threatened with a visit of indefinite length from General Windom."

"Why do you say threatened?"

"I was thinking of my schoolroom. It is sure to be dreadfully demoralized. And I was mourning over the poor governess, who will have all she can do in the best of times to maintain her proper position in the house, and not sink into that of the

petted daughter, or the young lady guest to be made much of!" She laughed merrily. "You see, my trials are likely to be the reverse of the governess heroines in novels; and it will be ten times worse when the family hero comes to be fêted and dined by every neighbor; with dear Mrs. Cleve never happy unless I am of the party, whether it is morning, noon, or night."

"What will you do about it?"

"I will stick to school hours, and allow no interruptions. After those are well over, I dare say the rest will be only good fun. You know I am a gregarious animal."

"Army men are great bores, to my mind," said Richard. "They are inevitably idle men."

"Oh, do you think so? To me it is delightful that there is any class of men not necessarily absorbed in money-making. Officers are, or ought to be, highly educated. Why should they not be the best recruits for science and literature?"

"Why, indeed? But in fact it is only here and there that you find such a one. I have not seen General Windom for years. Why did he not marry?"

"She died, poor girl!" said Rosamond gravely. "It was ever so many years ago. But, Richard, I am just now more interested in your future than in his past. What are you going to do this winter? Shall you come back here at all, or are you going on another journey?"

"Neither the one nor the other. I shall have to be in New York a good deal anyway, and I have a fancy to see more of society, and get a notion what it is like now-a-days. Living up here, I have grown very rusty."

"You have n't been here long enough for that; it is n't Thorncliff rust. Here we are at the Lodge gates. Don't trouble to come any further, Richard."

"May I ask what good reason there is for leaving you here instead of at the house?" he said, "especially as I may not see you again for months."

"Oh, not months!" she cried in consternation. "You will surely come back occasionally, if only for a day!"

"It may be necessary, but I was rather trusting to you to let me know how things are going. You will write, Rosamond?"

"Yes," she said, "I will write. Richard, I have written already some things that I found I could not speak. Take the letter now, please, dear; I sat up half last night to finish it."

"I understand — I am very grateful," he answered in a low voice, as she gave him a letter. "I know what an effort it was, Rosamond —"

"Yes," she answered simply, as they reached the door. "And in return," she added, rallying her spirits that they might not part in sadness, "you must write to me and tell me when you find her, Cœlebs!"

“Who was Cœlebs?”

“A literary acquaintance of my childhood; a contemporary of your grandmother, I should think. He was a young gentleman who took a journey — with a purpose!”

“With what purpose? What was he in search of?”

“Of a Superior Woman!” said Rosamond, with a merry laugh, as the door opened.

“One moment: you have n’t said good-by yet. Did he find her?”

“Oh, good gracious, yes! I should think he did! Go home and read about him, Rick; you will find him bound appropriately in calf, on the very topmost shelf, among Hannah More’s works. I must say good-by —”

“God bless you, dear!” He threw his arm around her, and stooped to give the brotherly kiss for which she held up her soft cheek.

“Poor little Rosy, it is too bad!” he soliloquized, as he walked home. “She is as brave as a girl can be, but it is a terrible change for her. I am sure I felt a tear on her cheek, and her face was white when the light fell upon it. Poor little Rosy! Well, if fate does have any happiness in store for me, we will have her back again in her old place — *we!*” He laughed at himself, and yet there was an inward glow at the possibility of such a dream being fulfilled. Was there then somewhere a woman, with magic power to touch the drear places of life and

make them bright? To kindle his ambition, awaken his ardor, and make home beautiful once more ; taking away the chill aspect of desertion it had worn ever since his mother had died, and Rosamond had left him?

“ Yes, *we* ! ” he said again. “ I dare say I am a great goose, Bounce, but all the same there may be such a person, and as she certainly will not come to me, I must e’en go in search of her, like — what is the fellow’s name Rosamond was talking about? ”

CHAPTER III.

ROSAMOND'S LETTER.

THIS was the letter that Rosamond had written, and which her cousin read beside his deserted fireside.

"Dear Richard," she began, "I write this for you all, because I find I cannot count on my composure when I try to *tell* you everything you wish to hear. I can only ask you to forgive the want of self-control which has distressed you when I tried to speak what I now write. I have put down things just as they came back to my memory. I wish I could have had the foresight to write every word as she spoke it — how precious each would be!

"It was in November; you, Richard, were in Palestine, Walter in Chicago, Charley still at Harvard, when I began to notice the first change in Aunt. It was not quite illness, — it was not exactly depression; I can only call it a change; a sort of stillness of mood; a deep thoughtfulness: but bright!

"She would sit quiet for hours, with an intent look on her face, — she whose industry had been our marvel, whose energies never used to flag! Some-

times she looked sad, and I would hear her sigh; but generally I saw a sort of subdued radiance in her face, which made me notice her more and more closely.

"If I asked her if anything was wrong she never owned to illness or pain, but answered simply, 'I was thinking, dear.' Once she said, with *such* a smile, 'I have never taken time to think, before; I have always been acting.'

"Charley, you must remember that Christmas, her last one, when you, of all, were the only one who could come home; and how you used to banter her about looking so young and girlish, and insist that she powdered her hair to make it look like a marquise at a masquerade! I don't think anybody, unless, perhaps, Dr. Peters, realized that she had grown very thin, and her hair very white. It only looked more graceful and bewitching, and she more beautiful than ever.

"Nobody will ever be like her in this, I think. There was such a wonderful appropriateness in everything she did and said, that all we ever felt in her was a sense of perfect harmony.

"But after Christmas was over, and Charley gone, the stillness increased until I felt awed by it, and hesitated to break in upon the solemn thought, whatever it was, that possessed her, with my every-day words. It was like an invisible spiritual atmosphere encompassing her.

"But she went about the house just as usual, only

so quietly! About this time she began to give up going out. A heavy cold was the first reason, and it lasted a long time, and kept her housed. She forbade my speaking of it in my letters to you, I remember.

"But I could n't help feeling troubled, and wrote privately to Dr. Peters about her. He came the next day, and pretended it was only a neighborly call. After that he drove over pretty often; and I know she did talk to him and consult him, though I was never in the room.

"And all the time she only grew sweeter and fairer every day, until everybody who saw her was perfectly fascinated. She wrote to each of you, you know, every week; and I am sure you missed none of her old brightness, for she would always turn to me and say, 'Now, Rosy, what is there to tell my boys which will amuse them?'

"But one day, suddenly the soft stillness left her, and was broken by a long violent fit of weeping. Dear Aunty! She laid her head on my shoulder, her precious head, and let me hold her, while she sobbed her heart out, and grew calm from utter exhaustion. Then she said, 'I am very weak, very wrong, dear, to distress you like this, but you must bear with me now; for, Rose, I am dying!'

"No need to tell what I said and did; you know too well by your own sorrow. I begged, I prayed that she would let me write and call you all back, but she positively forbade it. 'It will be a long

time yet,' she said. 'My heart has a great deal of throbbing and aching to do before it is at rest. I would not bring them back to wait perhaps for months here, growing sad and desultory. I hope better things than that for their dear young lives.'

"Another day she said, 'Just let me talk to you out of the abundance of my heart, Rose, and don't distress yourself about me. I will tell you if I am suffering, or if there is anything you can do. But just now my task is to wait, and it will ease the waiting greatly if I may say my poor words, just as they come, and you will hear patiently and quietly.'

"Dear, dear boys, you know I have tried often to tell you your mother's last words, for they always were the *last*. After she had eased her heart, as she said, by speaking out what was in her thoughts, she seldom recurred to that subject again. But I am so weak and foolish that I cannot talk about her without distressing you. So now, although it comes back to my memory in disjointed sentences, I write them down as I remember them, knowing each will be like a new gift to you.

"'It is about Richard I am thinking now,' she said one day, wistfully. 'My first-born! what those words mean to a mother! Richard will miss me dreadfully, Rosy, I think more than anybody. You must all do what you can for him, but only time will heal the hurt. I wonder often about his wife. I hope he will marry before long, for he has such a

reserved nature that if left to himself he will shrink and narrow.'

"Then with a little laugh, she added, 'I am such a poor creature now, that when I cannot find anything else to worry about, I select my sons' wives. Does it seem to you that Walter writes rather often about those young ladies in Chicago, and seems impressed by the accomplishments and charms of one of the sisters? My dear Rosamond, I wish I could see that girl.

" 'Walter has such a happy temperament; he is so capable of a life-long idealization, that I do not feel any great anxiety about him. He is his father over again. Poor Will never, *never* found me out, in all the years we lived together,' she added merrily, really merrily. 'He was a perfect Don Quixote in chivalry and romance.'

"Just to humor her, I said, 'Well, what next? Haven't you anything to say about Mrs. Charley?'

" 'Ah, the pretty little thing!' she answered, and then paused, and looked off into the distance, as if the real vision of Nelly's sweet eyes and sunny fairness rose before her.

" 'Now, Aunt, tell me, is there anybody *really*? Are you keeping Charley's secret?'

" 'No, you jealous sister! But my baby is such an ardent boy! So sure to fall in love early, to be won by beauty, and kept by worth, that I foresee for him a very rapturous honeymoon, and a great deal of happiness even in a checkered life. Ah,

God is very good, Rose, to give me such sweet assurance of heart about my boys! But I wish the vision would open for Richard, my first-born! It will go hard with him. You must do all you can for him, Rosamond.'

("Dear Richard I am obeying her in writing this. It seems now all I can do for you!")

"But how like a prophecy it all seems, read in the light of the present, and of the boys' early marriages. She seemed to have such a confidence in their future, such a glad love for them. But, Richard, her abiding thought, her one anxiety was for you.

"She talked also about the property a good deal, and the causes of its dwindling in value, and her joy that your first act on coming of age was to buy the Homestead, keeping it in the family, and making by its price a better provision for your brothers. Over and over she said to me, that I must remind you that they might still want help from time to time. 'He will always be willing,' she said 'but he may not always see. You must remember this, Rose.'

"I am going to put down here something she said one day, which will make you laugh, as it did us at the time.

"'I am so jealous of Richard's love,' she said, 'so conceited in my belief that I am the only person who can really satisfy him, that I sometimes wish I could pass in spirit into his wife's form, like the woman in that dreadful story of Edgar Poe!' And then she suddenly turned from laughter to

weeping, saying, 'O Will, Will, my darling! As if I could not thankfully leave even our boys, to be with you again!'

"I think after this she grew brighter and stiller. Some things she wrote down, you know, for you. Directions about the servants, and arrangements about her little personal possessions, and about me. Dear Aunt! I need not go over all that. I am afraid I was heavy on her heart. But one subject for gratitude I shall always have; and that is that no suspicion of any change in my fortune crossed her mind. She thought my independence secure; and only wished in my case too, that, as she said, 'the vision would open.' If she had given me any especial directions as to my future life, I should try to obey, but I think she could not see clearly, and would not hamper me by expressing her wishes. But, dear brothers, I feel sure she would say I am doing right in staying near home, and not being a burden on any of you.

"I remember I had made up my mind at last that I would disobey her, for the first and only time, and write to you all about this dreadful heart-disease, that you might set your faces homeward at all events, and be in a manner prepared; when, before I had done so, she said suddenly: 'To-morrow, Rose, I will write to my boys, and tell them the truth. Dear fellows! I see now that my silence has been all wrong. A little waiting on a sick mother would not have harmed their lives, as I foolishly imagined.

At all events, they shall have the chance. I will call them all back to-morrow. And oh, what a joy to have them again !’

“ I do not know if I can write you all she said that night. We sat by her fire, at least she did, in her long, soft dressing-gown, and she let me brush her beautiful hair, while she talked on, just as the mood touched her. What I will not try to write is what she said to me personally ; but her words are my most sacred treasures ; and if it is really true that I was a comfort and help to her, — a true daughter, as she said, — God has been very good to me ! I wish I could half tell you all the beautiful things she said afterward, as I sat at her feet, with my head resting on her lap. It was like seeing heaven opened, to hear her words of undoubting conviction ; the sweetest, happiest trust and expectation ! I felt as if our Lord himself might be sitting beside our ‘ little fire of coals,’ answering and approving all she said. Her heart was full of the home she was going to, and ‘ dear Will,’ as she always called your father. But when I finally coaxed her to bed, she said, ‘ Yes, I will write to my boys to-morrow, and what happiness it will be to have them back again !’ She went back, smiling, to your baby days, and murmured, ‘ My bonny Walter — my dear Prince Charley — and O Richard, my king !’

“ I think you know, dear Richard, and Walter, and Charley, that I am writing of the last evening of your mother’s life, and have put down her very, very last

words. I kissed her, and went to my bed in the next room; and, as I told you at the time, not a sound, not even a sigh did I hear, though I lay awake for hours thinking of her.

“But when morning came, we knew too surely that into the silence within and over the beautiful untrodden whiteness without, came the noiseless messenger whose footsteps left no traces on the snow. It has always comforted me to remember what a beautiful night she had for her last journey, and how brilliant the starlight was as she went out. And I have always believed that she passed through my open door, and stopped to leave a kiss on my forehead! It would be so like Auntie! Who shall say that to you, dear Richard, in your distant tent, and to Walter far away, and to dear Charley sleeping in his college room, no mother's spirit came, — no last blessing was breathed? Such things are possible.”

CHAPTER IV.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

THE same train that took away the bridal couple brought an unexpected guest to Mrs. Cleve, and while the cousins were chatting over the fire, and later walking over the snow, she sat with her brother in her bright drawing-room, rejoicing over his arrival, and glad that the interruption to their tête-à-tête would be only the advent of Rosamond, whom she loved like a sister.

Six years had passed since she had last received him as a dearly welcome guest, and in that interval they had met very seldom. The thought of that last visit was in her mind now, with a renewed ache of sorrow. He had come to her as a bridegroom, his marriage day fixed, and all the pleasant bustle and importance of such a time filling the house, and making every day gay with hope and pleasure.

And the sister had hoped that her persuasions, added to the coaxing of the sweet young bride, would avail to make him leave the army, and settle in their immediate neighborhood. The very house had been selected, in her mind, and many merry hours had been spent in sketching to him the sweet-

ness of country life, and planning the occupations which would cluster around each day, and prevent his finding civilian existence a bore.

And then, like a bolt out of a clear sky, had come the sudden, the terrible change; the wrestling with disease, the hope, the despair! And the very morning of what should have been their bridal day saw the sad procession winding among the hills to the last quiet resting-place. Henceforth Mary Arden's only record was on the marble cross, cold and white as the snow on her grave, and in the warm, bleeding heart of her lover.

Six years! He had lived a frontier life for the most part, and kept away from the overpowering memories of his sister's home. She looked at him now with fond sympathy. He showed the wound still; his face was graver, sadder, his hair lightly touched with gray. But as he looked up and met her wistful eyes, his smile was frank and ready, and his voice had its old ring to her ears. Oh, thank God, Time has such "wondrous healing"! Why should not sorrow vanish like the snow, and life open to a second spring? It can, — it must, thought the sister; and through all the chit-chat that followed, her heart was glowing with renewed hope, and slowly in her woman's mind a plan was forming, — a plan for the future. Almost unconsciously it shaped her words.

"I know I ought to send you to bed, you poor tired fellow!" she said. "But I am selfish enough

to keep you a little longer, for I shall not go myself till Rose comes."

"Rose! Who is Rose?"

"Rosamond Leigh. Did n't you know she was staying with me? Oh, you don't remember her at all, Harry—you need n't try to look as if you did! She was only a child when you were here. But you surely knew the Thornes?"

"I remember a beautiful Mrs. Thorne, who lived a mile or so from here. I thought she died."

"She died nearly two years ago; it was the greatest possible loss to the neighborhood. This poor girl was her adopted child, and is left quite unprovided for."

"This poor girl is the Rose whom you are sitting up for? Why did not Mrs. Thorne make better arrangements? It is getting late."

"No, not much after half-past ten. I suppose if Rosamond hadn't inherited a very nice fortune, her aunt would have laid up something for her; though, after all, it would not have been easy, for there was never a large income. Rose was, in fact, at that time a much richer woman than her aunt. If Richard Thorne had not received all that money from his uncle, I don't know how they could have even kept up the place. At any rate, not two months after her aunt's death, my poor Rose found herself not only alone, but penniless. All her property was in a trustee's hands, and that trustee was, unfortunately, Isaac Worth. Don't you remember

the failure, — the great failure of Jenkins and Worth?"

"There are so many failures."

"This one was particularly bad. The man Worth was so universally believed in and had a great many trusts. He kept on to the last, paying interest out of the principal, until the smash came."

"Everything went, I suppose; the country is full of scoundrels."

"Alas, yes! But it was dreadful for Rosamond to lose aunt, money, and home at a blow."

"Why home? Is Thorncliff shut up?"

"There were only the three sons, — young men. Richard was abroad at the time, and it had been arranged that his mother and Rose were to join him in the spring; Walter was at the West, and Charley only a boy in college. There was nobody to take care of Rosamond. She stayed on for a while, but between loneliness, and independence, and the proprieties, she decided to leave before her cousin's return. She has a great many friends; and, between visits, and the seaside in summer, she has gone on until this autumn, when she went back and arranged Thorncliff for the brides' visit. After that she promised to come to me. I wonder what detains her so late."

"I saw a tall, very handsome man getting into the train with a well-dressed woman, as I landed here. Now I think of it, it was Walter Thorne; I remember his face."

"He is not one to be forgotten. A superb creature!"

"Why did n't he fall in love with your Miss Leigh? That would have settled matters charmingly."

"They were brought up in such absolute brother-and-sisterliness, that I don't suppose the thought ever occurred to any of the boys; though I confess it has often to me."

"Of course it has, you born match-maker!"

"Oh, I have given up match-making," said his sister with a guilty flush and smile.

"Not you! Well, go on. I don't believe the girl is coming to-night, by the way; it is nearly eleven."

"Oh, she will be here soon; she sent over her luggage this afternoon with a note. We have had a very gay time lately entertaining the two brides. Charley's wife is the prettiest little Titania you ever saw."

"Are all the boys married?"

"All but Richard. He is not so attractive as the others to my mind, but he is a very respectable, sensible sort of man, — perhaps the least bit of a prig! Walter is quite our pride. He is not yet twenty-eight, and has a position in the College of Engineers already. You must have heard of him."

"I assure you, my dear, that his fame is quite local; at least, it never reached me in Oregon. How long is this young lady going to stay?"

He stifled a yawn, and looked rather bored at the prospect.

"Dear Harry, if it were any one but Rose I should be sorry; but I promise she sha'n't bore you. And then you know she will be busy in the school-room much of the time."

"The schoolroom?"

"Did n't I tell you that she is coming to teach the children? She would n't stay on any other conditions."

"Oho! thus you settle the governess question."

"And none too soon. The little monkeys are getting to be marvels of ignorance, laziness, and health. This is a capital plan for them and for me, for my life is lonely enough sometimes."

"I can well believe that, with Cleve absent."

"And that cannot be helped, this year, nor perhaps next. After that I hope for better things. If it were not for the little girls I would not let him go alone; but how can I take them to the horrid places he often has to stay in?"

"You do quite right, Greta; a settled home is essential to children. You can't think how it spoils them to wander, as the poor officers' families do. Perfect little torments! How much do you suppose your young woman knows about teaching?"

"My young woman, as you call her, is thoroughly well educated, and has a great deal of tact and sense. But lessons have not yet begun, and I am in no hurry about them. I should like to have her for a

little visit first. You must help me to amuse her, Harry, and keep her from sinking into a dreary governess life."

"Very well; but how about the chicks?"

"Oh, the delay will do them no harm. I don't approve of too much cramming of little brains."

"Little brains are like little mouths, — they must be crammed, if they are to grow bigger."

"I don't want their mouths to grow bigger, thank you. Hark! What dogs are barking? She must have walked over. Yes, I hear the hall door opening. Ah, truant, you have come at last! Come in, — I am so glad! Enter, my First Class Governess!"

Not one moment had Rosamond for sad recollections. Richard had noticed a tear on her cheek, but she brushed it away — and for one instant only paused, with her hand held tight to her heart, as if to press down its load — one tearless sob escaped as she whispered, "Oh, my lost home! Oh, my lost brother!" The next moment she heard the merry call, and with a brave effort thrust sadness aside, and stood in the curtained doorway, dropping a demure courtesy.

"Thank you, m'm, I hope I shall give satisfaction!"

CHAPTER V.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

THAT night Rosamond's pillow was wet with homesick tears, and her heart heavy with passionate yearnings ; but the pulses of youth beat vigorously in spite of sorrow, and as she wakened to this first day of her new existence, and saw the sun shining brightly on her beloved snow-clad hills, she realized that life was still fair.

Her prayer was for work, for usefulness. The long months which had passed in sad irresolution were over. Her visits to friends, her lingering in old grooves rather than cross her cousins' wishes, were over. She had emancipated herself. She had secured one spot where she could earn honorably her home, cheered by the sense of usefulness, and of nearness to the friends who loved and valued her. She felt that her lines had fallen in pleasant places.

And if life looked bright even in her chilly bedroom, how brilliant was its aspect as she opened the door of the breakfast parlor and stood for a moment struck with surprise ! It was indeed a pleasant picture, and, to her, entirely new and un-

expected, for this room was a recent addition to the house.

A large bow-window, so large that the breakfast table, gay with silver and pretty china, stood in its enclosure, opened upon an exquisite view of the river and hills, all blue and snow and silver. The window frame was nearly hidden by clustering ivy; and pots of flowering plants, sent from the greenhouses on the southern slope of the lawn, stood in every nook and corner, and filled the air with their fragrance. Another window opened upon a sunny balcony, glazed in to form an aviary, and the cooing of doves, and shrill sweetness of trilling canaries, came through the gilded netting, and added to the tropical effect. It was summer intensified, and the contrast with the winter without produced a bewildering effect on the mind.

Two little white-aproned girls of seven and nine years of age ran to her and nearly pulled her down in their joyful embrace; while the pretty mother, in dainty attire, stood warming her feet at a blazing fire, and enjoying with soft laughter her children's reception of their governess.

When the little arms were loosened, Rosamond received an equally loving welcome from her hostess, and a polite greeting from the newly arrived brother; and Mrs. Cleve confessed to a delightful feeling of triumph in the success of her *coup d'œil*.

"I adore a surprise," she said, "and I purposely kept you away from this part of the house

in all your visits, that I might enjoy the sensation of this identical moment! Isn't the room charming? And the one above, which is to be the schoolroom, is just as lovely. It has the same bow-window; the same aviary, which runs up two stories to the piazza roof; and I presume its occupants will be equally sociable and musical, for I notice the more shy birds stay up high and only come down for their bath and breakfast. Kenneth has orders to keep your window always full of flowers like this; for where flowers will bloom, children thrive, you know. I have always had the theory that the children's study ought to be the very pleasantest room in the house."

"And, cousin Rose, our dolly-house is in one corner of the schoolroom," cried little Christine; "so that we can take nice rests after our spelling-lessons. Oh, how I hate spelling! *Need* we have it more than once a week?"

General Windom sat with amused gravity, watching Rosamond's face of gathering dismay.

"Need we? Need we learn to spell *much*?" vociferated both the children.

"We will talk about that after breakfast, when we take possession of this too delightful schoolroom," said Rosamond.

But Mrs. Cleve quickly interposed: "Not quite so fast, dear; it is still vacation time. The children are by no means ready to begin, and I am by no means ready to give you up. You owe me a little visit first, after a year and a half of coaxing; and

now that Harry has come, I have a hundred plans on hand, which would prove entire distractions to study. All that can wait."

Rosamond looked grave, but said no more, while the children clapped their hands, and held up their faces to be kissed. "Nice little mamma! kind little mamma!" they said.

"Very misplaced gratitude!" murmured Mrs. Cleve with an arch glance at her brother. "I am not thinking of their good just now!"

"No, there I quite agree with you," said Rosamond very low; but she would not discuss the matter before the children, and sat revolving this first difficulty in her mind, and rallying her forces to meet it.

As soon after breakfast as she could capture the bright little mistress, who flitted from birds to flowers like the very spirit of summer, she drew her aside, and began with resolution, —

"Dear Mrs. Cleve, we are really making a great mistake in this. *Please* let me have the children without delay, and begin our regular life. Every day lost will make it harder for them and for me. Yes, I know you mean it in kindness; but I ask as a real favor that I may begin now — this morning."

"My dear Rose, it is impossible. The room is not in order; something is wrong in the chimney; and the Forsythes are coming over to lunch, on purpose to meet you."

"I shall be very glad to see them," said Rose with a perturbed face. "But there is time for lessons

first. And is it any matter if the room is not quite ready? I am sure I should not mind a little confusion at all, myself."

Mrs. Cleve was a woman of many resources when she had a point to carry, and they did not fail her now. No, she was determined. Rosamond should not sink into daily drudgery yet. A little time should be given, first, to girlhood and gayety. And then her little plan,—her delightful, incipient, inspired little plan of the night before,—that must not be forgotten!

Her brother would stay on perhaps a month. Surely, in the daily intercourse of that time, with all the pleasant involvements of drives and walks, dinner-parties, skating on the river, quiet firelight talks, books, music,—he *must* be charmed, must be caught in the meshes she dearly loved to weave. And that Rosamond should be a captive in the same bright web, was never doubted by the loving sister.

And all this would be spoiled if she allowed the daily grind to begin with the children. After all, what happy, healthy little monkeys they were! What possible difference could it make to them if they remained in blissful ignorance one month more! Swiftly these thoughts passed through her mind while her beautiful limpid eyes rested calmly and inquiringly on Rosamond's face, which really looked, she had to confess to herself, quite in earnest, and not a little vexed.

"I am so sorry," she began. "If it were anything but the chimney! But I expect the masons any day; you know what country workmen are, and how impossible it is to hurry them! The bookshelves are not finished, either. Riggs promised them a week ago. I must send over to-day and find out when they will be ready. There is nowhere to put the schoolbooks."

"Dear Mrs. Cleve, two primers and a slate!" exclaimed Rosamond, laughing. "But let me take the children up to my own room until the 'study,' as you call it, — I hope not too ironically, — is ready. It is quiet and out of the way there."

"Oh, my dear child," cried Mrs. Cleve, "I wanted to tell you about that room, and how sorry I am. I never meant to have you *monter aux cieux*, as it were; but I have put Harry into the room you would naturally have had, and the blue room is, like so much of the house, not quite ready. As Eugene says, nothing makes a home so uninhabitable as improvements!"

"I like my room so very much, please do not move me down! And it will make a nice quiet schoolroom for the present."

"Why, my dear, it is a refrigerator, — a Nova Zembla!"

"There is a fireplace," suggested Rose.

"But there has never been a fire in it, and I do not feel sure of its capabilities. In fact, we have rebuilt every chimney in the house excepting that

one; and some day, when I get a chance, I shall attack that last stronghold of bad work and incapacity. But just now, dear, until the schoolroom is ready, and the blue room is ready, be good, be kind! Stay here one month, one little, short month, as my guest, my daughter!" She longed to say, "My sister!"

"But, Mrs. Cleve, do just think how hard it will be for me to capture the children after a whole month of such a different character!"

"My dearest Rose, drop the governess, and be yourself, — the sweetest and brightest of girl visitors!"

Rosamond's resolution was now taken.

"Are you sure," she said, "that the schoolroom cannot be used; that the children would suffer in my room; and that there is no other chamber in this great house where we could go?"

"It seems strange, but really and truly there is no room I can conveniently give you quite yet."

"Then," said Rosamond, her face clearing into a smile, "it will be the very time for me to make my little visit to the McMasters. They have urged it all along, but I did not see, before, how I could arrange it."

"You dreadfully wicked, disappointing girl!"

Rosamond laughed.

"*They* will not call me bad names!" she said. "Dear Mrs. Cleve, nothing would have made me contented to stay here, when General Windom has

returned after so long an absence, but the fact of being busy with the children, and keeping them and myself out of your way and his. If I cannot do this yet, I am better at the parsonage, and they want me very much. You know how delicate Mrs. McMasters is; and nothing will do me so much good, till you need me, as looking after her and pottering about the parish with the rector."

"Rose, Rose, *I* am delicate too! And I need you to take care of *me*!"

"You look so, poor thing!"

"You need n't laugh; appearances are deceitful! And you may 'potter,' as you call it, all over the country with Harry! Why should you go and bury yourself in that dullest of houses?"

Rosamond smiled, but tears stood in her eyes.

"If I could show you my heart!" she said. "If you could see the homesickness which is eating into it, the yearning for past days and lost faces, you would know that nothing but hard work will do me any good. Let me go, dear, to this sick friend and her busy husband. They need me. If I had not promised you, I think I should perhaps have stayed with them all the winter. But I belong to you, and will come back as soon as I can have my children and begin work. And don't be afraid of my being dull. I love them both, and so did Aunt; and you know what a charming, intelligent man the rector is."

"I know he is well enough, out of the pulpit,"

said Mrs. Cleve with a *moue*. "Rose, I will confess. *Peccavi!* You are too much for me! I am a humbug! I did not hurry the workmen, I would not have the blue room ready, I put you into that frightful sky-parlor, all on purpose to cut off your opposition and secure you for a nice little visit first!"

"Isn't it dreadful to be caught in your own trap?" laughed Rosamond. "But so far as the sky-parlor is concerned, I am decidedly the gainer. It is delightfully cool and quiet."

"Cool, indeed! The water will freeze in your pitcher!"

"That would matter little enough if pitchers were not brittle. Dear Mrs. Cleve, this house is a great deal warmer than any I have been accustomed to. I have only to open my door, and the Tropics will rush into the Arctic Circle, fusing the whole into a Temperate Zone! Now, isn't that learned remark worthy of my new vocation?"

"Wilful, wilful!" murmured her friend. "Do you know, Rose, you are doing me positive harm? Nothing ever hurts me so much as not having my own way!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE RECTORY.

NEVER was a house in greater contrast with the wealth and luxury of "Cleveland," as Mrs. Cleve had christened her handsome, much-remodelled place, than the plain humdrum parsonage of the small Hudson River town. It stood in the village street, surrounded by its simple country neighbors, and in close proximity to the little church. The steep road leading down to the river lost much of its beauty of view from the clustering factory chimneys at its foot; and there was nothing picturesque in the mingling of white wooden houses and commonplace brick stores, which lined its sides. But the church, which stood on a grassy side-road, was of gray stone, and very pretty; and close beside it was a little village library, with reading-room, and classrooms for the night school, — a building dear to the rector's heart, and representing an amount of toil, energy, and resolution known only to himself and the Master he served.

For the wealth of this parish was in the scattered homes of the good-natured, luxurious, hospitable few, who gave moderately of their money, sparingly of

their interest, and very grudgingly of their time. It was heavy, uncheered work to a man in the full vigor of life, to have his earnest purposes and bright enthusiasm always met by the stolid, friendly indifference of those who could have helped him so greatly. He often sighed for the magnetic help of fellow-workers, for the attrition of numbers, and the hard hand-to-hand conflict with the great evils of life, which his strength and ardor recognized as foemen worthy of his steel.

But his career, like that of so many men, had been fixed by his marriage. This was his wife's home. These disheartening, perplexing, affectionate parishioners were her life-long friends, her relatives, her clan. Not for that reason would he have stayed his hand from harder work, or she have kept him back; but an accident in their early married life had left her a hopeless invalid, prisoner to her sofa, and ill able to endure separation from old scenes, or life among strangers.

Here, in all emergencies of illness, every house was full of sisterly friends. In her brighter days she was cheered by constant visits and many acts of personal kindness from neighbors who, she well knew, loved her husband as a man, although they gave him little help as a clergyman.

For the rest, souls were as precious in the country as in the city; and small as the parish was, there were many poor, many who suffered, many only too ready to go astray. The rector found his days full

of work and care; and the little, plain, cramped parsonage grew shabbier and simpler as time went on, and Mrs. McMaster's continued illness, robbing the house of a woman's care, and needing all possible alleviations, strained to the utmost a very insufficient salary.

To such a home Rosamond's visit was like spring flowers in the snow. Her aunt's teaching had opened her mind to intellectual thought, and directed her impulses into sympathy with the earnestness and enthusiasm of such a clergyman. His wife had been her life-long friend, and the two children, Peter and Anita, were her especial favorites.

Almost as soon as she arrived, she begged for the little ones as pupils. There was no good school in Mattekil, and the children in this, as in most other families, were home-taught. But in their case the mother was teacher, and in her days of incapacity the rector added this to his other duties. They were delightful children, quaint, simple, and full of wise little thoughts and considerate tact. "It will be such charming, easy work," pleaded Rose, when the mother demurred, "and I need the experience so much. I have felt all along what an experiment I am making, and how badly I shall probably begin."

"Do not think that," said Mrs. McMasters. "Your ideas are right, and daily experience will correct any mistakes. The first step is to learn how much to expect of a child, and in this my little pair will give you very slight assistance, for they have

been long taught, and, though I say it, well taught; whereas the little Cleves, I imagine, have been allowed to run perfectly wild."

"Yes, they have never had any lessons but from their *bonne*, who has made a queer mixture of French and English in their ideas. I am prepared for all that sort of thing. The real trouble will be with their too kind and indulgent mother."

"Yes. Margaret Cleve is the sweetest and brightest of neighbors and friends, but the word 'discipline' is not found in her vocabulary. She will never help you."

"I know it; I saw that flight was my only chance. Now, dear Mrs. McMasters, let me put myself for this whole month under your orders, and in teaching Peter and Anita I shall be learning how to manage Mina and Tina."

"A whole month! No such luck!" sighed Mrs. McMasters. "This week will not pass, before the chimney will draw perfectly, the desks will come home, the bookshelves be filled, the carpet laid! Margaret will lose no time, now that she sees you are really in earnest."

"It was a masterly stroke, your coming here," laughed the rector. "I wish I could think of any masterly, or McMasterly, way of keeping you to ourselves, and securing a teacher for our own chicks."

"And you should have all the superfluous salary for your pay," said his wife, smiling.

Rosamond was distressed.

"Salary is nothing," she said. "If I had only known you wanted me! But I made the promise to Mrs. Cleve last August, as soon as I heard that Richard was coming home. I did not feel that I could stay on at Thorncliff, and I wanted to have a definite plan to meet his objections with."

"Did he object?"

"I did not tell him till last night," said Rose; and then she stopped short and looked bewildered. Was it only last night that she had walked over the moonlit snow with Richard, and in her heart had said good-by to her home, her brothers, her past? It might have been last month; it might have been last year!

"I do not think he was displeased, though surprised," she went on after a moment's pause, — a moment in which she felt the unspoken sympathy of her two friends for the unspoken emotions of her heart. "But I feel sure he would have preferred my being here. I wish I had known!"

"My dear, we could not be so selfish," cried both her friends. And the wife continued, —

"We have nothing to offer but a share of our cares and our burdens. At your age, and after your past life, it would be most unfitting to tie you down to such a stupid, humdrum existence as ours."

"Now, for my part," said the rector with a sly look at his wife, "I don't think we are such stupid, humdrum folk! To my mind, that lady on the sofa

there is every bit as good as her neighbors. And I humbly hope I am not entirely behind all these good Dutchmen who farm their bottom lands, and excite themselves over the 'New York Herald.' Don't let us have any mock modesty, my love!"

"The 'Dutchmen,' as you call my numerous kin by way of classification," said his wife, "are not in themselves enthralling fascinators, perhaps; but you must have entirely forgotten your own youth, if you do not realize how much more their homes are fitted for girlhood and enjoyment, than anything we can give. But there is no question, alas! of the kind. For one week —"

"One month!" pleaded Rosamond.

"For one week — ah, less than one week! — we have her, and we will make the most of her. She shall nurse me and pet me, and read to you, and go to see your old women; but she shall not teach the children. We have laid out enough work, without that, for one week!"

Rosamond could not believe that the interval would be so short; still, with all her consciousness of present usefulness, her longing to feel settled into the harness made Mrs. McMasters's prophecy not displeasing. At all events, during the week, or weeks, before her, she would do what she could to fill a daughter's place in this house.

It was much needed. Winter had closed in early and unrelentingly, and Mrs. McMasters had been more than usually ill. In every room there was an

air of chill neglect, of unexpectant dreariness, which went to Rosamond's heart, with the sense not only of present forlornness, but of sharp contrast with the past life and bright early home of the patient invalid. The little shabby house with its unused drawing-room, and worn, dusty library, was so different from the beautiful country home where she, the youngest of ten children, had been brought up, petted and care-free. The scattered members of that early home were all gone now ; but its traditions of gayety and hospitality lingered, and made a picture of brightness which threw the present into deeper shadows.

This was the outside view only, as Rosamond knew. At the root of all this life of pain and poverty was a deep peace, an unswerving trust, and the blessed mutual love which spoke not of mine and thine, but only of thee and me. Still she felt that outsides had their own importance, and believed that no reproof would follow any improvements she could make.

In fact, after a morning spent happily in arranging the dusty bookshelves, hanging fresh curtains over the staring windows, and instructing the little untrained maid in the proper care of grate and hearth, she had the amused satisfaction of hearing the rector say to his wife, " My dear, it is wonderful to me that you, lying in this one room all the time, can preside over the entire house, and make everybody in it comfortable and useful. It is like fairy-work. That little maid of yours is improving constantly. She makes my study delightfully warm and clean."

Rosamond exchanged a meaning smile with the lady on the sofa, who gently shook her head.

"It is fairy-work, my dear," she said, "but you are praising the wrong fairy!"

Among so many friends who belonged both to parish and kindred, gifts flowed in, sometimes in profusion, but always with much irregularity. Rosamond revolved this subject in her mind, and took counsel with the cook, who was an old friend.

"Bless yo' heart, honey," said the sable authority, "some days there's mo' than yer can cook, and mo' days there's jes nothing in the house. And the same with fire-wood. Now Squire Bent, he'llows to send us two cord o' hickory wood every Christmas, and dis ye'r he's gone over seas, and nubuddy else did it, and so the wood's 'most done gone, and I will jes have to speak to Master 'bout it. There's no use bodderin that po' chile upstairs; she can't tell what's gone and what's left. Me and Master jes settle it all between us."

No wonder the house looked forlorn.

"In a place like Mattekil," said Rosamond, "there ought to be no question of buying all these things. Wood — potatoes — milk — eggs — oh, a dozen other things I could mention are just going to waste in these great country houses, each with its farm and dairy. If only people would do it systematically!" She paused to think. A hint from her might accomplish much among these kindly neighbors, who gave so little money that they were bound

to help in ways which, while more convenient to themselves, might make the problem of daily life so much easier to their rector. And yet, would her dear friends like to be thus helped? Did it savor of almsgiving, or patronage? She dared not move in the matter without further light. But one thing she felt sure of,—Thorncliff must do its part.

It was strange how unconsciously she resumed the daughter's place in her old home when any decision had to be made. She called it, in her own heart, a past joy, a turned leaf in her life; but not for a moment did she hesitate to send a message of full authority to the housekeeper there, to send over weekly a certain amount of farm produce, cream and butter. "Have a regular day to send," she wrote, "and as nearly as possible send the same quantity every week." And no idea of disobeying Miss Rose's orders ever crossed Martha's mind any more than when she in old days brought a message from her aunt, and added to it plenty of merry coaxing of her own.

Mrs. McMasters proved a true prophetess. Not one week had passed, before Mrs. Cleve, all pretty penitence and impatience, alighted from her shell-like sleigh, with its soft fur robes and gayly tufted horses, which stood pawing the snow, and shaking their spirited heads until the air was filled with the music of "sweet bells jangled." As she entered in her bright beauty and prosperity, smiling and gracious, in lovely velvet robes and costly furs, to claim

Rosamond, the little room in which she stood seemed to grow more shrunken and more shabby, and the brilliant face which stooped down to kiss the pale cheek on the sofa seemed to leave it more pallid.

She laid a glowing bunch of hot-house flowers in the thin hands.

"It is a peace-offering," she said gayly. "I am come to rob you of your Rose, and I bring my own poor roses, in all their insufficiency! Please forgive me for being cruel; but you know it was not with my good-will that you had her at all."

Rosamond had shaken hands with General Windom, who accompanied his sister; and she now came back from a peep into the study, to report that the rector had gone out.

"But we cannot stay," said Mrs. Cleve, "much as we would have liked to see him. This is not a visit, only a summons. I came for you, my Rose. All is ready for you, — flues successful, books arranged, children willing!"

"Are you quite sure of that last statement?" laughed Rosamond.

"I know other people are willing!" said General Windom. "Do have pity on us, Miss Leigh, and take the little torments in hand! Every day makes the task more appalling."

"It is quite true, though unflattering," said his sister. "Marie was teaching them very badly, but since she has given up lessons it has been even worse. They are getting quite unmanageable."

"I belong to you," said Rosamond, "and you have the first claim. I will come back to-morrow morning in good time for lessons."

"Oh, I will send over this evening! Some of our friends are coming to dinner, and I hoped to coax Mr. McMasters to come with you, if he will forgive the informality of such a short notice. I will send the carriage for them at six." She turned with pretty, gentle cordiality to the rector's wife.

Rosamond's eye also sought that pale, sweet face. She felt sure that there was more than usual suffering under its calm repression.

"That will be delightful," she hastened to say. "It will do Mr. McMasters good; it always does people good to go to you, dear Mrs. Cleve, you have such a power to brighten us all up, and bring your summer into our winter. I do not believe he has any engagement, Mrs. McMasters. Let us promise for him. And I am so glad Mrs. Cleve will send over, and save him the long, cold walk. But for me, I have an engagement to-night, and cannot possibly come until to-morrow. I will be back as soon as breakfast is over."

"An engagement?" murmured Mrs. McMasters, in surprise.

"Yes, dear; I have just made one and cannot break it. Mrs. Cleve will forgive me; she will have quite enough of me after to-morrow."

The little lady in velvet and feathers did not yield the point without a great deal of low-voiced coaxing

in the entry, and her merry voice called back from among the bells, "Rose, you are a humbug!"

"Yes," said Mrs. McMasters, who heard from her sofa, "I believe you are a humbug, Rose. What engagement can you have?"

"I am engaged to spend the evening with one of Aunt's oldest and kindest friends," said Rosamond, smiling. "We shall talk of her, and of all the people I love. Dear Mrs. McMasters, would you really banish me this last evening?"

"But, my darling, the dinner-party! You surely would like that!"

"I like you far better. Mrs. Cleve would have three hundred and sixty dinner-parties a year, if she could get the people to come. There will be only too much going on in that gay house. I feel as if nothing but close work with the children would keep me from growing quite demoralized."

"Teaching those very young children will hardly be enough," said Mrs. McMasters, who was herself a woman of cultivation. "Charles and I were speaking about it last night, and about what your aunt would wish."

"Ah! that is what I long to be sure of!" said Rosamond, tears starting to her eyes.

"She so often talked of you," said her friend. "You were much on her heart at the last, Rosamond; she spoke of it to me."

"Oh, please tell me!"

"I think she could not make up her mind as to

your best course. Perhaps she divined what you would feel about leaving Thorncliff, and of course she supposed you would always be independent in your means."

"Yes."

"But she never seemed to like to give any direction for your future," continued Mrs. McMasters. "She said to me, the last time I saw her, 'I know you will all be good to my dear child, but until I see Richard I hardly know what is best for her. I will put it out of my thoughts until Richard comes back.'"

"Then that is the reason she never gave me any clew to her wishes," said Rosamond; and she sighed deeply. "And I, on the contrary, did not wait to consult Richard, but rushed in where an angel feared to tread!"

"The case was entirely different," said Mrs. McMasters. "What could your cousin have said or done? I think you acted wisely, and it will all turn out right. But for the present, Rosamond, you will need more to do; you want to keep your best tool, your mind, bright and ready. Why not come over one day in the week, and read Dante with me?"

"Delightful! Surely I can find the time."

"Oh, without doubt. You must keep your afternoons free. Did Charles speak to you about playing the organ?"

"Yes. I should be glad to try, but I am much out of practice."

"Your playing will be a great improvement on poor little Miss Smith's."

"Without vanity, I think so too. But her power of regularity may be much greater than anything I can attain to while living at Cleveland."

"My dear, I see that only time can settle these questions. You will do what you can, and we will not expect too much of you. Will you take your Sunday class again?"

"I hope so. I should be sorry to give it up."

"And, dear Rose, if anything happens to change your plans, come to us. Remember you have always a home here."

"A home!" said Rosamond, with brimming eyes.

"You think home is over forever, but I do not believe it. You have a welcome in many homes now, and some day your own will come to you."

Rose shook her head, but would not discuss the matter with that pale, suffering companion. She set herself to make her as comfortable as was possible, and to help her conceal from the anxious husband how ill she really was; and Mrs. McMasters managed so well to subdue any sign of suffering while he was present, that she sent him cheerfully off to his pleasant evening, secure of her safety in Rosamond's care.

And in perfect quiet did the evening pass in that shaded room, Rosamond softly bathing the aching brows from time to time, until the heavy eyelids drooped, and the breathing became more soft and

regular. And then she sat quietly, looking thoughtfully at the fire, and did not stir until she heard the rector's step on the piazza.

He came in, all freshened by his pleasant evening, and delighted with so good an account of his wife. And he, too, had plenty of good advice to give as to the disposal of her spare time. Rosamond thought nobody quite realized what a small portion of time it might prove to be, as she heard it neatly mapped out for her approval.

"You tell me you are coming over to read Italian with Mary," he said. "That is well, so far as it goes; but you want something stout and close for a sort of mental backbone for every day. Here, I have just the thing,—good hard reading!" And he pulled out Müller's "Political History of Modern Times" from the bookcase. "Take it, my dear, and I shall enjoy talking it over with you when we meet."

"Thank you very much. Richard was deep in it last week. I thought it looked pretty hard reading, but I shall enjoy it, if I can find time."

"My dear, you *must* find time. You will never be a frivolous girl, but neither must you come to a stand-still. And another thing—those factory girls; you will take your old class?"

"Oh, I hope so. I wish it very much, and hope I may be able."

"Then I will depend upon you. And will you try to go to see them as you used? They have grown very desultory, lately, and scattered."

Rosamond felt distressed.

"Dear Mr. McMasters, I can hardly promise that," she said. "You know they are never at home except in the evenings. In old times I always had Charley or Richard to take me down to the village; but now it is different."

"That is true," he said thoughtfully. "And even if I could take you myself, I do not know that I ought to interfere with your evenings. You belong to Mrs Cleve now."

"Yes. You understand that it is not that I do not wish to go. I long to help those girls. If Aunty had lived, it was a favorite dream of mine to have them come to me for one pleasant evening in a real home every week. It would do them good in all ways. But as it is, you see I am hampered."

"I see. You cannot help yourself. I will get word to those girls that you are ready to begin, and I think all the stragglers will gradually find their way back. And I may depend upon you for the organ?"

"Inasmuch as a governess may promise," said Rosamond. "But, Mr. McMasters, I can play only in the daytime, I fear. I do not think Mrs. Cleve ever goes to evening church, and she dines late."

"There will be no evening church this winter. I have done with lighting and warming the church for the rich, who stay at home and have tea-parties, and with writing two sermons for people who won't come and hear them. I am going to have, instead,

a sort of cottage service in the schoolhouse, close to the poor people's homes."

"What a good plan!" said Rosamond. "I hope your room will be crowded! But, Mr. McMasters, the families here are perfect clans, you know, and Sunday evenings are such pleasant, nice meeting-times! The young men come up from the city just for that one day, and would be so disappointed not to meet all their cousins and friends. It always seems a natural, pleasant way of spending the time."

Mr. McMasters was rather struck by the sort of tolerant spirit, beyond her age, in Rosamond's remark. She seemed to have caught it from her aunt's nature. He paused for a moment, and then said: "My dear, you are right to sympathize with your young friends; and what you say of its being pleasant and natural is quite true. It *is* good for these boys to have the old homes to come to, and the old welcome always ready. But then, there is my side of the question. You must see it was of no use keeping the church open."

"Oh, I see! And perhaps now they will all come in the afternoons more regularly," said Rose.

"Perhaps!" sighed the rector, and then he smiled. "*Perhaps* was the little bit of hope in the bottom of Pandora's casket. Keep on saying it, my dear!"

CHAPTER VII.

UPHILL WORK.

"**N**OW, Mina, come away from the window, dear ; and Tina, bring me your French exercise. Don't watch the horses now. I think mamma means to let you go out in the sleigh this afternoon, if I tell her you are *very* good."

"Yes, but it won't be any fun without you and mamma. Will you go with us, Cousin Rose?"

Rosamond hesitated. She was obliged to guard her precious hours of freedom from these small encroachers as vigilantly as she fought for her uninterrupted working-time.

"No, that I will not promise," she said. "Now begin without any more delay. Bring me your grammar, Tina."

"The sleighbells sound so tantalizing !" said the little one with a sigh ; but she brought her book obediently, and began to recite her verb. Certainly in the month that they had been Rosamond's pupils there had been a vast improvement in the children ; but oh, what uphill work it was to keep order and discipline !

A knock at the door.

"Well, Dinah !"

Rosamond was so sensitive to these frequent knocks, that she was obliged to watch her voice, and keep out of its tones the irritation which seized her at the summons.

"Mrs. Cleve told me to come up, Miss, and tell you that Mr. and Mrs. Van Zandt have come to call, and could you just step down a few minutes, seeing they live so far away, and don't come often."

"Dinah, please ask Mrs. Cleve to excuse me, and explain to them why I am not able to come down. The children have just begun their lessons, and I cannot leave them. Be sure to give them my love and say I am *very* sorry!"

She heard the door close, and sighed.

"Such dear old friends!" she murmured. "Why will they *never* come in the afternoon, when I am free? Go on, Tina, — 'J'ai, tu as.' Mind your *u*'s, dear. Don't pronounce the *a* too long. There, that is better. Oh, what is it now? Come in!"

"Miss Leigh, may I interrupt one moment?"

"General Windom, is it you? I thought you had gone on the river!"

"I came back to see if you could not join us, after all. It is such an exceptionally beautiful day; we may not have such another. The river is like glass, and the horses go like the wind! Do come!"

"Did you really come all the way back for me? How very kind! But how much I wish you would not tempt me! I cannot leave in the morning, as you must know."

“Why not have school in the afternoon instead?”

“Now, General Windom, you a soldier, and not know the value of discipline! What is our army coming to? It seems ungrateful to send you off summarily; but please go! I ought to be able to look to you for help in the garrison, and, instead, you join the besiegers!”

“Go on, Mina and Tina. Your teacher is much wanted by all the rest of us. You ought to reward us for giving her up to you by being good scholars!”

He was gone. Rosamond bit her lip with vexation and amusement.

“Go on, dearie. Don’t look out of the window, Mina. I hope this is the last time we shall be interrupted.”

The merry bells died away in the distance, the verb was recited, and then two diligent pens scratched over the copy-books. There was an interval of peaceful quiet. Outside, the sun shone brilliantly, the river gleamed in the distance, and from time to time an ice-boat flashed across the picture, or a party of skaters gliding up and down drew attention from the tasks as the little girls peeped through the screen of ivy and geraniums. Within, the fire glowed brightly, and the birds in the aviary window twittered and sang. Never was there a more delightful or a more distracting schoolroom. Rosamond would often have gladly exchanged it for the barest attic in the house. But she told herself that, after all, not only to the children, but to herself, the

lessons of self-control, firmness of purpose, and concentration of mind, which might be gained there, were of no less value than French verbs and English spelling.

The quiet was of brief duration.

"Rosamond, may I come in?" And the pretty little mother entered, and caressed each upraised face with her soft hand. "Go on writing, darlings, I won't interrupt you. Oh, Rose, the Van Zandts were so sorry not to see you, and they left an invitation for you to dine there on Thursday. I promised for you; for although we meant to have the Suydam girls here that night to play casino, I thought this evening would suit them as well; so I came in to ask if you would write a line to them for me, while I go and tell James about the marketing. He will take the note."

"Oh, mamma, may we sit up?"

"Oh, mamma, I can play casino! Really, I can! Mr. Charley Thorne taught me when I was quite a little girl!"

"You long-eared little pitchers, who ever dreamed of your listening and comprehending? Go on writing, dears!"

"But *may* we sit up?"

"Perhaps. I'll see about it."

"Oh, that means we may!"

"Little monkeys! How do they get on, Rosamond?"

"How *can* they get on, Mrs. Cleve, with so many

interruptions? Please forgive my rudeness, but if you knew the number of people who knock at that door! Except for that, they are learning fairly well, I think. And they are *very* good."

"I am glad of that. Well, I'll not keep you any longer. If you'll just write a line to Jeanie and Mabel to ask them to come up after dinner this evening, for the game."

"Oh, mamma, ask them to come early!"

"Hush, chicks! That is all, Rosamond. James will come for the note when he is ready to go."

She closed the door. Ten minutes passed. The note was written and sealed, and a sum was begun.

The door opened. "Dear Rose, one moment! Excuse me, but I think it would be as well to ask the girls to come to dinner. It will be easier for them to get over by daylight, and it will gratify the children."

"Very well," said Rose, with a suppressed sigh; for both the children threw down their slates and ran to their mother.

"Dear little mamma! pretty little mamma!"

She gave them a full dose of petting, and then tore herself, laughing, from their clinging arms.

"Now, study hard!" she said.

After a restless quarter of an hour they settled down again to their tasks. James came for the note.

"I suppose the cook will 'step up' next," murmured Rose to herself. But the children did not look

up, and for at least twenty minutes lessons went on prosperously.

“Well, Dinah!”

“Miss Rose, the little Maydews are downstairs, and they want our children to come out and coast with them!”

“Oh, Cousin Rose, Cousin Rose! Oh, *please!*”

“Sit down at once, children! Dinah, tell them that it is schooltime and the children cannot possibly leave their studies. No, of course you cannot coast at eleven o'clock in the morning! What a preposterous idea! Tina, go on with your sum; not another word!”

Words failing, tears came instead. Rosamond was greatly perturbed.

“Tina, if you cry, I am sure mamma will not let you sit up this evening. Now, be very good, and as soon as lessons are done, you may run out and play; and Dinah will ask Effie and Tom to wait for you. There will be plenty of time to coast, if you will only work hard, and get through your lessons quickly.” Dinah, who had been looking very black and solemn at the episode, now departed smiling.

Rosamond's inner voice soliloquized: “What a farce it all is! Home education, forsooth! And what a savage old schoolma'am I am growing to be! Think of my having made a child cry! Tina, darling, come and sit on my lap, and we will try that sum together. Cousin Rose did n't mean to be hard on you. We shall both have to learn that ‘he who

ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh a city'!"

"I d—don't want to take a city!" sobbed the child. "I like the country best, and the lovely snow; and I want to go and see Effie!"

"Then let us get through this one lesson more, and you can run out to your lovely white snow," said Rosamond, tenderly wiping the tear-stained little face, and kissing the golden head. "We should have finished by this time, I think, if so many people had not come to hinder us. Now it is very nice and quiet, and we will try and get through. Oh, *what* is that!"

That was not so much a knock as a thump, and a flounder, and a scratching. Rosamond opened the door in bewilderment, and was nearly knocked down by Bounce, who jumped on her, barking, slobbering, whining with joy.

"Bounce! You dear old doggie! How *did* you get in?" Rosamond sat down on the floor, and threw her arms around his great neck, and pressed his head to her face.

Here was all that was left to her of the dear old home! Of all who had grown up with her, studied and played, laughed and wept, lived and loved with her in that precious past, only this one remembered her now, and sought her out in her changed life!

There was no rebuke for this interruption, no thought of banishing the new intruder. The chil-

dren, with one long look at "Cousin Rose's" face, exchanged a glance with each other, and with childish tact and delicacy subdued their own excitement and bent over their books. And quiet reigned at last in that sunny room; while Rosamond, with a grave wistful face, and gentle low voice, went on with her teaching, and the old mastiff, close beside her, laid his head in her lap.

Except for the abiding homesickness deep down in her heart, Rosamond, with all the perplexities of her position, found life charming. There was not, it is true, one person in the house or neighborhood who took her work seriously. Not one helped her to secure its success, or refrained from every species of temptation and interruption; but when she had fought off all these, and finished her daily task, then nothing which could add to the pleasantness of life was lacking. The beautiful luxurious home opened wide its arms to her, and laid all its treasures at her feet. No daughter could be more indulged and petted. Servants, horses, mistress, and mistress's brother, — all were at her service. Her friends were eagerly welcomed as guests, and her loving little hostess seemed to anticipate every wish and extend every pretty attention, from the fresh violets on her plate at breakfast, to the tender good-night talk by the cosey dressing-room fire. Every moment she was made to feel herself loved and cherished. General Windom had overstayed the month which his sister had only half dared to hope for, and gave as yet no

sign of being ready to go. He was a little like her in his sociability of nature; but saddened by an early shock, and living so long a retired life, he had gained much more, both of reserve and thoughtfulness, than she possessed.

Almost to his surprise he found that Miss Leigh's presence, instead of being a bore, gave a great charm and harmony to the home. Perhaps in that atmosphere of ease and indulgence, the soldier's instinct responded to the one person who showed any sense of discipline and duty. He found himself watching Rosamond with much interest in her efforts to keep a straight path through this flowery plain. It was not easy, and duties clustered thick about her after the great duty of the day was finished and the children were free. Rosamond's "leisure" was by no means idle. Her church music required much practising, her Italian readings some preparation. The books with which the good rector kept her supplied, were by no means the kind that can be read in the drawing-room, among the voices of laughing friends. Many errands came from her cousin's letters, — delightful errands, for they led her to Thorncliff, and to an inspection of stables and hot-houses and a chat with the servants. Neighbors came without number; calls, calls, all day and half the night; and always some dinner or lunch or drive, involving merry meetings with old friends and much kindly gossip. Through it all Rosamond steered her way as well as she could, following the guiding light, which always shines for

those who seek it. She would not fail in her regular visits to the rectory, and she would not fail her children, and she would not leave her church duties undone; but all the rest must take its chance, and she must content herself with doing her best for the moment.

Through all the teasing delays of a late, indolent Sunday breakfast; through all the flimsy excuses which frequently convinced Mrs. Cleve and her many guests that the day was too cold, or too damp, or too stormy, that the walk was too wet or too long, and walking impossible; through the unfailing recapitulation of the good reasons why the horses could not be used, — a shoe dropped, a harness out of order, or “poor James” in need of a holiday, excuses which vanished like a mist when Monday morning dawned, — Rose kept her course smilingly and steadily. She did not judge others, she did not reprove; but she went her way. Storm or sunshine were not alike to her, but each alike found her at her post. Young, strong, and with ready heart, the walk to church was no obstacle in her way. The very friends who praised her music, and rejoiced that she could play the organ and deliver them from the three tunes of poor little Miss Smith’s *répertoire*, followed her home to lunch, and reviled her for leaving them “in the lurch” while she went back to the Sunday school. The very ones who in old times used to say, “Who can listen to two sermons a day? One is all I can stand!” now remarked, “What is the use of going

all that distance for just the service? If there were a sermon, now!"

And Rosamond laughed, and left them. The children went too; and very merry was the walk over the snow, and the little ones were much exalted to be placed in a small Sunday-school class, while Cousin Rose took charge of her own, made up of big factory-girls. General Windom always appeared for the service which followed. And Rosamond thought, with approval, of how often in the army this devotion to the church was found, and enjoyed the belief that there was one other in the house who felt as she did. She little dreamed that his sister had silently removed every obstacle to his going, and protected his departure from the observation of her other guests, to whom she turned with a little smile of compunction over her own shortcomings, mingled with satisfaction in the dawning of her hopes and plans.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO TO ONE.

“**H**ARRY, it is too delightful to have you staying here so contentedly,” said Mrs. Cleve to her brother, as they sat by the library fire in the twilight, for once without any guest to partake of the early cup of tea. “You always seemed bored by Mattekil before, and I hardly dared to hope for a tolerable visit. Now, confess, what is the attraction?”

“You are always most attractive, my dear.”

“Oh, of course; but I don’t know that I have developed any new charms lately!”

“On the contrary, I discover new charms every day! And then Cleve’s absence —”

“Now, Harry, that is, that must be, even to you, a loss!”

“Even to me! I should think so! But as there is this sense of loss, of loneliness, I feel myself more than usually needed for your comfort and protection. I feel, in short, that I am a very valuable addition to your happiness!”

“You are all that, without any conceit; although the conceit may be there, all the same!” said his sister. “But there have been other winters when

Eugene has been absent, and I have been left alone here with the children, quite unpitied and unvisited by you."

"The children! ah, yes!" said the fond uncle. "They grow more and more charming every day. They improve astonishingly. I am very fond of the children!" He looked at her with laughing eyes.

"You are a humbug, and I know you are laughing at me; but, all the same, what you say is true. They are greatly improved; but why?"

"How could they fail to improve, with such a mother?"

"*Merci!* Harry, tell me truly, now; do you, after all, find it such a bore as you thought, to have a young girl in the house?"

"I adhere to all I ever said about young girls. They break up society, dissipate conversation, confuse a man's mind dreadfully!"

"Now, brother!"

"It is all true. For my sake you invite them here in shoals; night after night they come to dance in these crowded rooms; they come to play charades, and giggle in the middle of every sentence; they come to play whist—Heaven save the mark! I should say, voluble 'bumble-puppy'!"

"I am sure Rosamond plays a capital game of whist!"

"I am speaking of girls! Day by day I drive them on the river, and skate with them, and go on made-up errands to their houses,—just your excuse

for getting rid of me, and putting me in the way of amusement."

"And does it not amuse you?" asked his sister, smiling. "I have never perceived the least reluctance."

"I am not a hermit, nor quite an octogenarian yet! I like pretty faces and merry young voices, as I like birds and sunshine. But just as I turn from these, in summer, to sit down in a cool shady room, with an interesting book, — so now, all that keeps me from being bored to death by this eternal youth and beauty is the fact that from time to time I can escape, and refresh myself by talking to two sensible women like you and Miss Leigh, who neither demand flattery nor amusement."

Mrs. Cleve laughed.

"I am greatly indebted for my share of the compliment," she said. "But I doubt whether Rosamond, at twenty-one, would be equally gratified to be relegated to this middle-aged platform of un-exacting good sense, quite removed from youth and beauty! It is a shame!"

"Is she only twenty-one? I never thought of her age before; but she is in every way older than these other young neighbors."

"The Selden 'girls' are both over thirty," said Mrs. Cleve dryly. "The Van Coutts anywhere from twenty-six up! Little Daisy Pierce is only seventeen; but she hardly counts, for she never says a word."

"Oh, yes, she does; she says many words in a *tête-à-tête*!" said General Windom mischievously.

"It is n't only for your sake, dear, that I get them over here, so don't be conceited. This is such a dreadfully slow, dead-and-alive little place, and these girls lead such humdrum lives, that to have a military hero among us ought to be utilized in giving them a little chance of stir and excitement."

"What nonsense!"

"And then Rosamond has had such a sad time for two years past, and even now persists in spending such tiresome mornings! I want to get her back into girlhood again!"

"You never will. She has graduated into something far sweeter and fuller."

"Yes, oh, yes, you are right; I am glad you see it."

"Lookers-on see many things," said her brother thoughtfully; and he began to pace up and down the room slowly, while Mrs. Cleve sat and watched him.

"Tell me some of the things a looker-on sees in this house," she said.

"A looker-on sees a home full of sweetness and enjoyment, carelessness and indolence," he answered.

"And in the midst of all the snares which such traits and such pleasures bring, he sees one fair, faithful soul,—a woman, young, beautiful, and sought for, going on day after day in the unswerving path of duty." He paused.

"Go on," she said softly; and thought to herself,

"He calls her *beautiful*! Well, so she is to eyes that can appreciate her."

"So young, to be so steady and resolved! She shames us all; but she does not know it. She makes me think of that verse of Mrs. Browning's,

'She never reproved you, she sought not to chide
Your wrong by her right; and yet men by her side
Grew nobler — girls purer; while all through the town
The children were happiest that pulled at her gown.'

"My happy children!" said his sister with glistering eyes; and then she softly added, "Harry, I think you see a great deal, for a mere looker-on!"

He stopped short, and looked at her with glowing eyes. "Greta," he said, "do you think it is my destiny to be always a looker-on at the game of life? Never to take part in it again?"

"I hope you may, I pray you may!"

"If," he said, — "if I could begin anew, and try once more for a prize, would it be wrong or unnatural?"

"Oh, so right, so natural!" She sprang from her seat and went to him, linked her arm in his, and rested her head on his shoulder. "Dearest Harry, is it so with you?"

"I think so," he said. "Sorrow does pass, in time. I am conscious lately that the great sting is removed. I am conscious of new hopes, new impulses, — another spring, perhaps, in my life!"

"Oh, thank God!"

"Do not be glad yet. It is only spring; my summer may never come, perhaps. This may be only the beginning of another trouble."

"I will not think so," she answered.

They paced up and down the room twice before he spoke again. Then he said, with soldierly directness, "Do you think Miss Leigh is to be won?"

"She is a woman, therefore to be wooed.

She is a woman, therefore to be won,"

quoted his sister, smiling. "Why not? She is young and lonely. She has no other attachment."

She looked up at him, as he stood beside her, erect and martial, as one who faces the battle, with a new excitement in his deep-set eyes, — eyes whose sadness, the mark of past suffering, was always in singular contrast with the smiling mobile mouth, that bore equal testimony to the happy buoyancy of his natural temperament. A man of striking personality and distinguished presence, a brother of whom any sister might be proud. Her eyes spoke what her lips did not utter: "Who would not be won, if wooed by you?"

There was a long pause.

"She will not be easily won," he said at last. "Greta, I have made up my mind, and I will lose no time. I will speak at once!"

"Not at once! Oh, my dear, be careful!"

"It is a selfish precaution. I am doing it for my own peace of mind. I admire Miss Leigh

excessively ; but I am not, I think, quite in love with her — yet ! ”

“ Indeed ! ”

“ And I will not let myself, if I can help it, have another fall from the very summit. It costs too dearly. No. If there is no hope for me, I would rather know it at once, and not play with the fancy until it overmasters me entirely.”

“ But is that the way to win her, Faint-heart ? ” asked his sister, tenderly. “ How can a man ‘ not yet quite in love ’ find inspiration to move a woman ‘ not easily won ’ ? ”

“ I shall have to risk it,” he said. “ Greta, I really don’t dare let myself go, until I find out something of what my chance is. I know myself too well ; I have suffered too much ! The mortification of a refusal would be light to what I might have to bear ! At present I can live, I think, more or less contentedly, without Rosamond Leigh. A few weeks hence I might not be so philosophical. You must let me ‘ gang my ain gait.’ ”

“ “ And dree your ain wierd,’ alas ! I wish I could do it for you ! ”

“ Thank you, but a general leads his own attack ! ”

“ All the same, he need n’t despise a little reconnoitring party ! ” she pouted.

“ There is no time to waste in reconnoitring,” he said. “ What is the plan for to-night ? ”

“ Oh, Harry, you take my breath away ! Not to-night ! ”

He laughed. "I only asked what was going on. But yes, Greta, to-night!"

Mrs. Cleve rallied her nerve; after all, perhaps he was right. "Don't you remember we were going over to Temple Lodge for a dance? I wish you would take Rosamond, and leave me at home. I have a little headache."

"That last refuge of womankind!" said her brother, laughing heartily. "Oh, my dear sister, such innocent fibs as your sex can tell! A headache, with such a pair of eyes!"

"It is all excitement."

"Such blazing cheeks!"

"A hectic flush, my dear. Very well; call my malady by any name you please, I am simply not going. I want a quiet long evening at home to write to Eugene. My head is n't at all too bad for letter-writing."

"That is a great alleviation to my anxiety," he said. "What is the next step in your programme? Are we to walk home by moonlight together?"

"Why, yes, I think it would be appropriate. It is a lovely evening; and James does n't care to take the horses out at night, if he can help himself!"

"I never knew a James who did. I have no doubt this one keeps you in due subjection. Still, we had better leave Miss Leigh to decide about the walk. She has already been down to the village and back, and may be tired. Of course, for my own part, I should enjoy it of all things."

“ ‘ *Perpaps* you will, and *perpaps* you won’t!’ as little Mina says,” said his sister mischievously.

And so it happened, that after an evening of rather futile gayety, under the numerous limitations of a country neighborhood in winter; where there are hardly enough dancers to render that exercise anything but absurd, and chess and whist are frowned upon by the determined chatterboxes, while their substitute, a “round game,” with its swift degeneration into a frolic, gives an incongruous feeling of juvenility to the older and graver guests; Rosamond found herself, with a feeling of relief, leaning upon General Windom’s arm, and walking homeward over the snow. Unconscious of pre-arrangement, she very honestly deplored Mrs. Cleve’s headache; for she well knew how much more that vivacious little lady would have enjoyed the evening than herself, and how vastly more have added to the enjoyment of others.

“I often ask myself why I go,” she said. “I seem to be good for nothing but to play polkas and vales, which only spoil the evening for the dear old folk. Now, Mrs. Cleve always manages to fuse all the different elements together, until people really seem to enjoy themselves.”

“Yes, she is a sort of social pudding-stick,” said her brother, smiling. “She has a most gregarious instinct. Still, your music is not so unappreciated as you seem to think. It gives the young people much pleasure, and you are untiring in your kind-

ness. I often watch you as you play, and wonder where your thoughts have wandered."

Rosamond winced. She did not like to be watched. She was conscious that the playing was to her an opportunity, a rest, a privacy. While her fingers flew over the keys, with no diminution of spirit and expression, her mind was far away. A watcher might often see a sudden smile on her lips, or sudden tears in her eyes, as the strains she played recalled to her some bygone scene, — some evening in the dear home, herself a child, praised by the tender motherly voice for her improvement, teased by the laughing boyish tones, always practising for their pleasure and approval, always so proud and grateful to be of use to them.

She spoke her thought with sudden petulance.

"I do not like to be watched," she said.

"You do not ask me why I watch you," said General Windom; and something in the tone of his voice gave Rosamond her first perception of what was to come. She put up her hand as if to fend it off, and then rallied. She had got to go through with it, she said to herself, and little dreamed that her companion had just breathed to his own heart the same thought, — "I am in for it now!"

He spoke very well; earnest, plain, direct words of wooing. There could be no possibility of mistake, and yet she could hardly believe it.

She was entirely surprised. She had always thought of his life as settled entirely by his loss.

"Sacred to the memory of Mary Arden" had seemed to her as distinctly graven upon his heart as upon the gravestone. But a moment's reflection showed that this surprise was unreasonable. If his mind could recover its tone, if his heart could feel a new attachment, all his friends must rejoice to have it so. Only why, in Heaven's name, had he chosen her?

And yet he was a man of whose preference any woman might be proud. He had much to offer. His words, also, were soothing in their flattering devotion; why was it that she heard them quite unmoved, except by regret?

"I do not ask an answer now," he said, warming with his theme, until his sister would have acknowledged that there was little danger of slack wooing. "I only ask one word of hope to feed upon."

"But, General Windom, how can I say such a word? Perhaps it is often etiquette rather than truth, when a girl declares herself surprised by such a thing as you have said to me; but I assure you, in my case, the surprise is absolute. I never once thought of you in such a light."

"I can well believe it," he answered, "and I am not sorry to have the benefit of a surprise. An officer knows its value in some kinds of attack."

"Oh!" said Rosamond, rallying her spirits, "I cannot be taken by storm, I assure you!"

"Give me leave to try a siege, then."

"Oh, please don't! What *should* I do?" she cried in ingenuous dismay.

"I don't know how a besieged fortress may feel; perhaps it would not be safe to subject you to such a bore. All I ask now is, one word of hope; if you can even tell me you have no other attachment—"

"How could I have? But that is not to give hope. I assure you, truly and earnestly, that I never had a thought of you, except as a kind friend. That, indeed, I have never thought personally of —"

"Of love and marriage?"

"Yes."

"I rejoice to hear it. Perhaps you think, Miss Leigh, I have no right to rejoice in finding a virgin heart; no right to try and win its first freshness; but I assure you, should I succeed, I can bring a heart absolute in its devotion, even though in the past—"

"I was not thinking of the past," said Rosamond gently. "If you can again attach yourself, all your friends must rejoice. Only, please, not to me!"

"And I can only say that you are the only woman living who could arouse such an attachment."

Did she feel that he was fencing, guarding himself? That the impulse had not yet overmastered him? Not consciously, for Rosamond was new to such professions; but there was a certain lightening of spirit as the thought suggested itself to her that he was not very far gone.

If she could only fly home, and leave him behind! How horrid a declaration of love was!

He saw she was distressed, and, like a prudent general, he withdrew a little.

"I will not harass you," he said. "I will not ask even for that one word. I only judged it due to you and to myself, to tell you what my wishes are. But let me have every chance of favorable thought. Remember the life-long intimacy of our families; my sister's devoted affection for you. You are alone and desolate. I would make for you a home wherever you might choose, here or elsewhere. And all that the most ardent love, the most cherishing care could bring to make your future bright, should be given. If you could know how it stirs my heart to see you, the loveliest woman in the world, spending your youth in drudgery with those children; the home where you were happy closed to you; the relatives who owe you care and protection all dispersed, absorbed in their own lives, leaving you to make your way alone —"

"Are you blaming my cousins, General Windom? It was entirely my own doing."

"I blame nobody. I am only telling you how it seems to me to have the sweetest, bravest spirit I know on earth, — a woman young enough to know no care, and fair enough to make her a prize to be fought for, — left homeless, and disregarded."

"It is entirely my own doing," repeated Rosamond, her color rising at this picture of her forlorn state.

"Let it be your own doing, then, dearest and best," he cried, "to reverse this picture; to be set in a home where you shall reign like a queen, and where your mere presence will be the best gift of life to a heart wholly devoted to you."

"Please," said Rosamond faintly, "let us say no more. I thank you, General Windom, from my heart I thank you, for your goodness to me, but I cannot think it will ever be as you wish."

"As you say, we will say no more now," he answered with ready tact. "Here we are at Cleveland, and how it is lighted up to receive us! A perfect *feu de joie*! Even your sky-parlor is ablaze!"

Rosamond looked up startled and chagrined; she had so looked forward, during this interminable mile, to the coolness and quiet of her room.

As she said good-night at the foot of the stairs, she had to submit to rather a longer pressure of the hand than she was prepared for. Still, she knew that he had on the whole been very good and forbearing; and she tried to feel grateful to him, as she stole on tiptoe past Mrs. Cleve's dressing-room, devoutly hoping that the headache which had left her exposed to General's Windom's attack might lead to an early retirement.

Vain hope! She opened the door of her room to find a most unaccustomed warmth, a most unusual brilliancy; and seated before a sparkling wood-fire, clad in a beautiful fur-trimmed wrapper, and holding her tiny slippered feet towards the blaze, was the smiling hostess, — enjoying with mischievous pleasure not only Rosamond's look of amazement, but no less her look of being "caught."

"How do you like it, Rosetta mia? I was

determined to make you comfortable for once, as well as to enjoy another *coup d'œil*. I always fancied the chimney would not draw, but it draws famously. How do you find it?"

"I find it very hot, thank you!" said Rosamond.

"You ungrateful puss! It will soon be cooler; and meanwhile it is possible for even a sybarite like me to pay you a midnight visit. Take off your dress, pull down your hair, and come and sit beside me, and let us pretend I am a girl again!"

"You will never be anything else," said Rosamond, smiling, as she exchanged her black crêpe-trimmed gown for a wrapper, and drew a low chair to the fire. Mrs. Cleve moved her own close to her side, and drew Rosamond's head down to her shoulder.

"Now tell me all about it," she said.

"What does she mean by *it*?" queried Rose to herself; then aloud: "Oh, it was pretty much the same old thing you know; we have gone through just such evenings so often!"

"What!"

"It sounds ungrateful to say so, I suppose. I forgot how differently you think of such things."

"Rosamond, of what things? I have not the least idea what you are talking about!"

"Of the party at Temple Lodge, of course!"

"Oh, yes, of course!"

"There were only six dancers — it was pretty slow. They all missed you very much. Poor Mrs.

Brunt had neuralgia, and old Peter Van Dort got very angry about something in the game of whist, and we had our oysters and coffee, etc., and played 'commerce' with no prizes, — and then we came away."

"Of course — how stupid it all sounds! All the same I should have liked it, particularly the coffee. I hope you did not drink deeply of that enticing cup!"

"I am afraid I did. I was so sleepy. It was all well enough, but exactly like a dozen other evenings."

"All?" asked Mrs. Cleve mischievously.

Rose said nothing, but ostentatiously stifled a yawn. Her would-be sister-in-law was too sharp for such a hint.

"You are not tired, I hope? You did not mind walking?"

"Oh, not at all, thank you."

"You see," she continued, hesitating, "it seemed a pity to take James and the horses out if you both liked to walk just as well!"

"Oh, certainly; not at all worth while."

"And then," plunged in Mrs. Cleve, resolved to satisfy the curiosity with which she was tingling to the very finger-tips, "I knew Harry wanted the walk with you!"

No answer.

"Dear Rose, you have never told me what you think of him."

"Please, dear Mrs. Cleve!"

"Call me Greta, Rose, as Harry does; or Gretchen, as Eugene calls me!"

"It does not sound either natural or respectful to my 'employer,'" said Rose. "Still, if you wish it — Gretchen —"

"Oh, thank you, darling! Kiss me. I feel as if you had made me a gift! What were you going to say?"

"I haven't the least idea. You put me out," said Rosamond, laughing. "Is n't it very late?"

"Now, don't tell me you are sleepy after all that coffee!"

Rosamond could not honestly say she was.

"But your headache," she suggested.

"All better; or, rather, all humbug. It is to be hoped the recording angel does not count headaches in his list of fibs, or what will become of us poor women?"

"Do you mean that there was nothing the matter with you?"

"Not one thing. It was only a euphuism for 'I don't want to go, and I will not go!'"

"Oh!" said Rosamond, much edified. "Then next time I will have a headache myself."

"I am losing time," cried Mrs. Cleve. "Rose, dear one, tell me of your walk home! Tell me all!"

"What can I tell you, that you do not evidently know already?" said Rosamond with crimson cheeks and brimming eyes. "I will tell you, — Gretchen, —"

that General Windom was very kind, very undeservedly kind; and that until he spoke, I never knew what desolation was."

"What *do* you mean?"

"I never before saw myself as others see me, or realized the aspect of my life to a by-stander. I never knew that I was deserted — unprotected — forced to earn my own support, to find my own home; drudging away the morning of my life!"

"Rose, Rose, he *never* said that!"

"Perhaps he did not exactly say it, but I saw the picture. I feel all naked and ashamed. I had no idea I was such a dreary creature."

"My sweet love! You dreary, — you, in your useful, honored life, set among those who love and value you!"

"So I had believed until this evening," said Rosamond, slow tears dropping from her eyes.

"Believe it still, for it is true. It was only a man's way of putting things," cried Mrs. Cleve. "Nobody feels the real worth and value of the life you are leading more than he. It was in contrast only to the life he was trying to persuade you to live, — was not that it, Rose?"

"I suppose so," said Rosamond. "Mrs. Cleve, Gretchen, tell me — would you like it, if —"

"Like it!" She kissed her rapturously. "My own dear Rose, it would make me entirely happy. If you knew his heart — his wealth of love and unselfishness! If you knew how I longed to have him

happy! Is it really so, my darling? Are you going to say the word, and make us all happy?"

"No — oh, no! I was only speculating in my own mind, and wondering if you could really wish it! Don't you see, if it were the real thing I could not be 'trying it on,' and looking at it from outside in this way?"

"I see nothing of the sort."

"I am afraid I do," said Rosamond wearily. "One thing I know; I must never go into such a thing, unless with my whole heart."

"Oh, of course not. But what is a woman worth, if her heart is all ready at the first word? Give Harry a chance. He is so dear, so charming, so devoted! I am not afraid of the result, if you will only give him a chance. Surely, you have promised him as much as that?"

"I don't think I promised anything. We simply agreed to let the matter drop."

"You mean for the present, of course. Oh, Rosamond dear, that is all I ask. That *is* giving him a chance!"

"I did not know it. I believe I was more occupied with the picture of my own dreariness; contrasting it with Aunt's tenderness, and the brightness of old times. I did not mean to give any encouragement; I would do nothing unfair."

"My dear child, you are over-conscientious and over-sensitive. All will come right. It is only natural that old nests should be broken up, and young

birds fly. All that you have to do is to build a nest for yourself. And oh, please build it next to mine!"

Rosamond smiled with quivering lips as her friend kissed her good-night; and after the door was closed she stood for a long while leaning against the mantel-piece, and watching the fire as it died away in its glowing bed.

"After all, why not?" she said aloud, and then started at the sound. "I have to shape my life somehow; perhaps God sends me this chance. Of course I know that everything in the way of character, position, money, is offered to me. I suppose it would be even a brilliant lot. But the man himself—can I like him? He is handsome, of course; but I do not think I care at all about handsome men. And yet, now that I think of it, I do! Dear Walter is superb! I always gloried in his beauty, and so did Aunty. Our young Adonis, we used to call him, just by ourselves. Oh, Aunty, Aunty, how I need you now! Who will tell me what is right? Is this sent to me as my one chance of a home, a life of my own? Must I try to love this man who so generously offers me everything? Can I love him if I try?"

Tears rolled down her cheeks. Where could such questions be answered, but on her knees? She rose from her prayer, calmed and strengthened.

"I will wait," she thought. "That is what God wills me to do, I think. I will wait and see; and I will never let anything tempt me to do it but the

one feeling which would make all the rest easy and right." As she moved from where she had stood, for the first time she perceived a letter lying on the dressing-table. She sprang to seize it. "From Richard!"

Only a few lines from that briefest of correspondents, but they went to her very heart.

"I had this evening," he wrote, "my first chance to see Walter alone, in these many weeks, and to show him the letter you wrote for us all. I suppose it was right and natural that he should wish to take it away with him, to show to his wife. Perhaps if not right, it was equally natural that I should grudge her the sight of anything so personal and precious. At least, I stipulated that it should be returned without fail to me. He read it, as did Charley, with tears. They both mourn for our mother; but oh, Rose, I feel as if only you and I fully know what she really was!"

Rosamond read this note, and a sense of brotherhood and comfort crept back into the heart which had been so lately galled and wrung.

"After all, how can these strangers understand?" she said to herself with happy disdain. She laid herself down and closed her eyes; and no thought of love or lover came to disturb her light, soft slumbers.

CHAPTER IX.

BEHOLD HOW GREAT A MATTER A LITTLE FIRE
KINDLETH!

FORTUNATELY soft and light; for after an hour or so she awoke, struggling back to a sense of oppression, to a misery of heat, and to the realization of a thick overwhelming smoke. She sprang to her feet with the full knowledge that the house was on fire, and that the flames were bursting out in her very room.

Instant the conviction, and equally swift the action. Her wrapper lay beside her on a chair, her knitted slippers were close by. She drew them quickly on. All else must go; for long tongues of flame were leaping from the floor. Nothing could she save of clothing or treasures. Ah, yes! her fur-lined cloak was within reach, where she had thrown it on the sofa. Her watch, her Bible, Aunt Gertrude's picture, Richard's letter, lay on her candlestand. She gathered them all in her hand and fled down the stairs, sending her voice before her, — "Fire! Fire!"

Below, all was dark and silent. The fire was all above, her unlucky chimney, no doubt, its cause.

Mrs. Cleve was instantly roused, and full of presence of mind and efficiency. She lifted the bewildered children out of bed, and signed to Rose to dress them, while she sent their nurse to rouse the servants in the distant wing, and went herself to call her brother. He needed no summons, but was already nearly dressed, and as cool and alert as herself. Mrs. Cleve dressed herself hastily.

"Put on all their warm things, Rose," she said. And stripping the blankets from the bed, she quickly threw in clothing, papers, silver; while Rosamond tied hoods and tippets, drew on warm cloaks and leggings, and cheered the frightened little ones with bright smiles and words of encouragement.

In spite of all the help of the men-servants, with what General Windom could do, the flames gained upon them; and although as yet the lower rooms were safe, nobody could go to the seat of the fire, being forced back by the volumes of smoke bursting out in new places. Apparently the house was doomed.

In wonderful quiet, and with unflagging efficiency, Mrs. Cleve, with her whole force of women-servants, worked on, dismantling drawers and closets, and sending the blanketed bundles out to the snowy lawn. Rosamond helped as well as she could, with the children clinging to her; and Mrs. Cleve had just said cheerfully, "We are getting on nicely!" when in a moment all was darkness. The gas was turned off. Each servant gave a scream of dismay, and the children raised their voices in a wail.

Rosamond sprang to the mantel-piece and struck a match. Candles were at hand, which shed a dim light over the frightened group.

"Oh, what is it? Why is this? Harry, Harry, we *must* have light!" cried Mrs. Cleve, darting to the door; but Rosamond stopped her.

"Oh, Gretchen darling, don't you see how wise he is? It adds so enormously to the danger, having gas made at home!"

Mrs. Cleve sat down with a white face; for the moment she was completely unnerved.

"Rosamond," she almost screamed, "take the children away, — out of the house, anywhere! While they are here I cannot do anything more! Oh, be quick!"

"Let me send them to the stable with Marie, and I will stay and help you."

"Oh, no, go yourself; I can trust nobody else. Marie has no judgment in an emergency, and they do not obey her. Go, dearest Rose; I shall not have a moment's peace until you are away."

"Dear Mrs. Cleve, I will go, of course; but do come too!"

"Yes, I will come in a few moments. There is no present danger, and so much to do! I will follow very soon; but go, Rose, go!"

Rosamond saw she was right. No time was to be lost in making the children safe. She shuddered to think what might happen should any spark communicate with that sunken pit, so near the house, where

the gas was made. Mina and Tina, for the first time realizing danger, clung to their mother, sobbing and screaming, and she looked nearly distracted.

"Come along, chicks!" cried Rose, cheerfully. "Let us run down to the stable and make a bed in the hay for mamma when she gets packed up."

She took their little hands and hurried them down-stairs, where the front door stood wide open, increasing the fatal draught. She stopped to close it behind her, first lifting the night-latch.

"That is right, Miss Leigh," said General Windom's cheerful voice from the piazza. "I am glad you are taking the children away, and I am very glad you did not lock me out! Where is Greta? I wish you would persuade her to go, before she gets crushed by a falling ceiling!"

"She is hard at work, but she promises to follow soon. Are you getting on at all?"

"No, not at all. The whole house must go, I am afraid. The men do what they can, but it is of little use. What madness not to have a fire-extinguisher in a house like this!"

He hurried in to his bucket brigade, working under difficulties which can be appreciated only by those who have fought with fire, on a dark night, in a lonely country place, with no neighbor within a mile, frozen water, awkward men, shrieking women. Rosamond set off for the stables, running, for the night was bitterly cold. She scarcely realized the cold, although she was nearly frozen. She wrapped

her long fur-lined cloak about her and hurried on, calling out cheerful laughing words of encouragement to the little sisters, who trudged before her, hardly knowing whether they were awake or dreaming.

General Windom's words rang in her ears, — "a fire-extinguisher!" Why, there was one at Thorn-cliff, always kept ready for instant use, by Richard's orders! If only there were anybody to send! But what could she do? She could not leave the children to run back and hunt up a man and make him understand, — sending him over the mile of snow to waken heavy sleepers. Oh, it was too late! She wrung her hands in despair.

The stables were at some distance from the house, and for the present safe, although a chain of fences and sheds might easily lead the fire to them if it were not checked. James had gone to the house, and the door stood partly open. Within, the horses were quietly munching in their stalls. There was no light but from the winter sky. All was cold and dark and still. What could she do to keep the children warm?

A sudden resolve came to her mind.

"Jump into the sleigh, darlings," she said. And she lifted the little girls into the light cutter, and piled the fur robes around them. "Now if I can only get a light!"

She groped her way into the harness-room, and was lucky enough to fumble out a box of matches and a lantern. The welcome light was a great help.

She hesitated, looked at the children and then at the horses.

"I believe I could do it," she said to herself. "I certainly know how."

With some perturbation she lifted down a light harness, and then led Zuleika, Mrs. Cleve's pet mare, kind and docile as a spaniel, out of her stall. She threw the harness over the pretty creature's back, and began to fasten the buckles with no unaccustomed fingers.

"Now, Zuleika, my pet, be good!" she said, and led her to the sleigh, where the gentle animal stepped between the shafts, with entire comprehension of her duty.

"Oh, Cousin Rose, Cousin Rose, are we going to have a sleighride?" cried the children, peering over the robes and watching the last fastenings. They were wild with excitement. Rosamond's heart was quaking at the possible risk of the escapade; but with quiet, kind words she soothed them down, and in her slippered feet stepped out again into the snow, leading Zuleika and her precious freight.

She looked at the house. The windows were full of red light, but the roof as yet showed no flame, and Zuleika saw nothing to alarm her. Rosamond turned her head to the road, and then stepping into the sleigh she nestled down beside the children, and gathered up the reins in her uncovered hands.

"Now, dear little horse, go fast, go sure!" she

cried ; and swiftly gliding over the snow, they made their rapid way to Thorncliff.

In less than an hour fresh help was on its way to the burning house. Rosamond had brought her bairns safely to the old home ; had roused, more quickly than any stranger could have done, the sleeping servants ; and while good old George fetched the fire-extinguisher, his wife had sped to the gardener's cottage to waken the man and boy there ; and with full directions from Rosamond, and urgent messages to Mrs. Cleve, the sleigh, freighted with helpers, was driven swiftly back, and she could turn to other cares.

She found that her own good old nurse had quickly rekindled the kitchen fire, and was busy in making the children warm, — chafing their little chilled hands and unfastening the hoods and wraps.

" Oh, Mammy dear," she said, " how nice to have you to help me ! But can't you put those sleepy babies into your own warm bed ? and then we can get places ready for the others. I have sent word for them all to come."

" Certainly, dearie ; but what about yourself ? Oh, Miss Rose, Miss Rose ! Look at your feet ! Look at your dress ! Could n't *anybody* look after you ? You have done enough to kill yourself !"

Rose felt suddenly guilty, as when in her childhood she had received the full weight of Mammy's reproaches.

" Why, what could I do ?" she said. " It was

my own room that was on fire. I could n't reach a single thing but this cloak; and after that there was so much confusion and hurry that I did n't even feel sure I was cold! Mammy dear, really, I have no time to coddle! If you will just put these children to bed!"

"The children are doing perfectly well," said Mammy, sternly. "It is my own child I am thinking of. No clothes, no shoes! Why, then there is but one thing to be done!" She lighted a candle, with great decision of manner, and left the room. Rose jumped up and made her way to the cupboard.

"I thought I should find something!" she cried in glee; and she brought to the well-pleased children a handful of "jumbles" of a kind well known to them, for they often paid visits to Thorncliff with Cousin Rose.

"Now munch away, my hearties!" she said merrily. "Oh, there is Bounce! Dear old doggie, did you know I had come home again?" And only the fact that her feet were too nearly frozen for such exercise, kept her from dancing about the kitchen, while her faithful adorer leaped upon her wild with joy.

Mammy returned quite out of breath.

"Sit down, Miss Rose, and put on these stockings and shoes and all these warm flannels. Not a soul will come near you; dress right here by the fire, and I will put the children to bed. They are your aunt's clothes; and it's a mercy they were never

given away, for I don't see what else is to stand between you and freezing to death."

By the time Mrs. Cleve arrived, in response to Rosamond's messages of invitation, the whole house was glowing with warmth and welcome, — library, hall, dining-room, all blazing with firelight; beds comfortably ready, and the breakfast-table set with china and silver, while an appetizing smell of coffee and bacon stole from the kitchen. The three hours which had passed in these preparations had been very busy ones for Rose and her two assistants; but all was in order as the different sleighs began to arrive, filled with the entire female part of the Cleveland household, and the oddest-shaped parcels wrapped in smoky blankets and rugs. The house was still smouldering, though George had arrived in time to save the lower floor, and fences and stables were safe. Other neighbors had seen the fire, and help was pouring in as the morning dawned. The present duty was to warm and feed all this helpless tribe with the scanty resources of a half-closed house, and then to telegraph to Richard.

Rosamond managed to catch the gardener's boy, and to conquer his reluctance to leave a scene so fascinating, for her service. He was reconciled in part by her injunctions to harness a horse and drive *very* quickly.

"You must go to Grimes's shop," she said. "And if he has not opened it yet, go to his house and pound on the door until you make him hear you and wait

upon you. Make plenty of noise, for you know how deaf he is. I have written down this long list of things. Bring all you can in the sleigh, and tell him to send the rest without any delay. Then go to Dr. Peters and tell him about the fire, and say I wish he would come and see Mrs. Cleve. She is n't ill, say; but I want him to come. Last of all, go to the telegraph-office and leave this."

Her message ran thus:—

"Cleveland was burned last night. I have brought them all home."

Three hours later, Richard Thorne was on the cars, returning to this unexpected house-warming.

CHAPTER X.

MAMMY'S COTTAGE.

NO carriage met him at the train, and the station furnished no conveyance; small matter for that, on a beautiful winter day. He took his portmanteau and started on his walk.

From afar he could see the ruins of what had been such a delightful home, crowds of people gathering around the smouldering walls, throwing water, carrying furniture away, lifting parcels into wagons. With an instinct of helpfulness he turned his steps in that direction, and stowed his portmanteau under the hedge while he went to the assistance of some men who were carrying a piano. One of these was his own man, George; another was General Windom.

He spoke heartily to both, and, in lieu of handshaking, took one corner of the instrument and helped to bestow it in a wood-shed which stood at a safe distance.

"How did it all happen?" he asked.

"Nobody knows yet," said General Windom.

"The fire began in the third story, and the first alarm was given by Miss Leigh, who slept there.

My sister and the maids managed to save a great deal; and Miss Leigh took the children away; and fortunately this good man wakened somehow and brought his 'Babcock.' I doubt if without it we could have saved any part of the house."

"That was well," said Richard. "How did you happen to see the fire, George?"

"It was Miss Rose, sir. She came driving up with the little ladies in a sleigh, and she tied the horse, and come round to our window, sir, and threw snowballs till Martha waked with the noise, and heard her voice a calling!"

The two gentlemen looked at each other.

"Well done, Rosamond!" cried her cousin.

"But how did she get there?" said General Windom. "All the men were working with me at the house. Who could have harnessed the horse for her, I wonder?"

George grinned.

"Miss Rose can harness a horse as well as any man, sir. She did it often when she was quite a little miss. You mind, Mr. Richard, you taught her yourself!"

"That is true," said Richard. "But it was a plucky thing to do last night in the darkness and hurry!"

"An awfully plucky thing! A splendid thing, by Jove!" cried General Windom.

"Look here, Windom," said Richard, "you look perfectly ghastly! Have you been working here

all night? But of course you have. No food? No rest?"

"Well, scarcely," said the veteran. "Rest comes after the battle."

"But the battle is pretty well over. George can stay and superintend the moving of the furniture. Here are hosts of helpers, and, so far as I can see, nearly everything done that can be. Let us walk up to Thorncliff, and at all events get some breakfast, and come back later. It's quite time to look after you a bit; especially if you are at home on sick-leave!"

"Not I; I never was better in my life. I have a long furlough, and perhaps may not go back at all to the army. That is, I *may* receive orders to that effect," he said, smiling.

"Orders! Oh, I see; private orders!"

"Exactly."

"A new kind of business, with a partner, eh? May I congratulate you?"

"I hope so; I should like to believe it! But I am afraid it might so far be a little premature."

"At any rate, I wish you joy for the present," said Richard heartily. They had walked so fast that Thorncliff was near at hand, its red walls almost hidden under the snow-tufted ivy. It did his heart good to see the open blinds, the smoking chimneys, the look of life once more.

A tremendous barking of dogs roused Rosamond as she sat on a low chair by the library fire, nearly

asleep, after her night of fatigue. All had been done that was possible in so hasty an effort of hospitality. Mrs. Cleve was asleep in bed, and the doctor had enforced a decree of perfect quiet for her after her unusual exposure and fatigue. The children were safe in Mammy's care, the servants busy in unpacking clothing and valuables, and preparing dinner for the unexpected houseful. The fires were burning brightly, and a pleasant look of occupation and home had returned to the rooms.

Rosamond, though feeling sleep impossible, had found time for bath and toilet, and had viewed with dismay the aspect of her only gown, a light blue wrapper, singed with flame, blackened with smoke, and dampened by snow.

"There is nothing else to be done, as Mammy says," she said to herself, and went directly to Aunt Gertrude's stores.

When Richard, preceded by Bounce, Dodge, and Charley's terrier, and followed by General Windom, opened the library door, he stood still for a moment in a sort of awed surprise. It might have been his mother who rose from the low easy-chair, with a look of soft bewilderment and dawning gladness. Just her height, the same slender, shapely form, dressed in a long, dark-blue silk, which he well remembered; it needed only the slightly silvered hair and tiny lace cap, to complete the resemblance of Rosamond to her aunt, — a resemblance which had hitherto lain dormant and unrecognized, but which

flashed upon him for a moment, filling him with surprise and emotion.

Only a moment, but it added to the fervor of his greeting; and in her joy at his speedy arrival, and the sudden lightening of her sense of responsibility, she saw no one but him. She had not felt her burden until she slipped it off upon his broad and willing shoulder; and on that same shoulder she rested her head for a moment, with the sweetest sense of relief and protection.

"Rosamond," he whispered, "you looked, as I came in, exactly like my mother!"

"Oh, Richard, I cannot help it! These are her clothes; all mine were burned up."

He held her off, with his firm, supporting arm, and looked earnestly at her.

"My poor Rose! Are you quite worn out?"

"Oh, not in the least! Never better! Tell me, Rick, did I do right in bringing them all home?"

"Right? Anything else would be wrong! I am proud of you; I am grateful to you. But here is Windom, the last to leave the scene. Take care of him, Rose; he is perfectly done up!"

Rosamond saw him for the first time; and something in his eyes, as he looked at her, caused the color to rush to her cheeks in a burning wave. But she held out her hand simply and kindly.

"Forgive me; I did not see you before," she said.

"Richard, Charley's room is all ready for General Windom; you will find a fire and a bath there."

"All right; but he can eat neither bath nor fire, and he must be nearly starved!"

"Oh, how thoughtless I am!" she exclaimed. "You shall both have some coffee in two minutes." She hurried out of the room, and as she took out decanters and glasses, and gave hasty directions to the maids, still that crimson flush revealed the distressful recollections of the walk of the night before. The night before! Was it possible? It might have been a year—a lifetime, so utterly did she feel removed from that episode in her life; so entirely her old self had come back in the renewed sense of home.

That fire made a great change in the lives of its various victims. The house was of course entirely uninhabitable, and must be rebuilt nearly from its foundations. It was dismantled of all its furnishings, and an army of workmen turned in; but many months would elapse before anything like a home could rise out of the ruins.

Mrs. Cleve had many plans. Her first wish was to rent Thorncliff for a year, and settle down, brother, governess, and all, with no serious break in their lives. She privately consulted Rosamond, who was aghast at the idea, and had much difficulty in concealing its distastefulness from her friend. Her one longing was to have them all go, and remove from her life this embarrassing suitor, with his expressive eyes and unfailing attentions. Had she unwittingly "given him encouragement," whatever that might

mean? In any case, what could she do but wait? It was not for her to speak first.

Her only hope was in Richard. She believed he was too fond of his home, of his farm and his fields, to cut himself off from their charms for so many months. Also, she felt sure that his search for a mistress for Thorncliff was going on still, — whether or no in a definite direction, she could not tell; but, his mind once made up, his was no character to brook delay. A brief wooing must suffice the lady who should be enthroned over this fair domain.

As for General Windom, she tried to forget him entirely, and unless in his actual presence succeeded in banishing the unwelcome thought. She was so gay, so unreasonably happy! She told herself in vain that the situation was not changed, and that the problems of her life were as perplexing as ever. A change had come over her spirit. She no longer contemplated herself as alone and deserted, but felt sure, to her very heart's core, of sympathy, help, welcome. The dear gladness of home had come back into her life.

“I need not marry,” she said to herself. “I know a better way than that. I will not stay here, though. In that I was right; if Richard wishes to marry, it would hamper him greatly to have me in possession. And as for living on with Mr. and Mrs. Cœlebs, even if she wished it” — she made a grimace of dismay, and laughed softly to herself. “No, my new plan is much better than that, — my dear little new plan!”

And when Mr. Cleve wrote in the most urgent way to his wife to join him, without delay, in San Francisco, and bring the children, the sense of emancipation to Rosamond was delicious. She loved Gretchen, but she panted to have her go. She admired General Windom, but she hoped she need never see him again.

As for Mrs. Cleve, her views were very different. She lingered on, with so much to do, so many matters to settle, that Richard's hospitable entreaties were most grateful to her, and even a fainter expression of his welcome would have insured her stay. To her roseate imagination all was prospering. She saw her brother more and more absorbed in his devotion to Rosamond, and, she never doubted, nearer and nearer to its reward. She saw the flushed cheeks, the timid eyes which met his ardent glances, and she believed they betokened dawning love. And the gayety and joy of Rosamond's manner at other times — what else could it mean? Her hopes sprang so far from the reality, that she even imagined that if she could delay her journey a little, her brother and Rosamond might accompany her, on their bridal tour. That would, indeed, reconcile her to the loss of her valued governess! With misdirected tact she fostered all General Windom's opportunities, and encouraged him, by her sympathy and aid, to make his admiration and devotion unmistakably felt.

Richard could not but perceive it. He saw it with mingled amusement and impatience, as the manner

of an idle officer, the inherent gallantry of a mere society man. It would not have mattered, had he not recognized the obvious emotion and embarrassment of Rosamond. Surely she was not so young, so unpoised, as to be taken in by this meaningless devotion ; a fellow she had known so little, — a man, by his own avowal, engaged, or nearly so ! He felt that it behooved him to warn and guard his cousin ; but he would hardly have believed it of her, — a girl brought up by his mother !

And so day after day passed, until the days ran into weeks. Happy weeks to Rosamond, in spite of this drawback. Happy weeks to her cousin, renewing his sense of home and hospitality. Busy weeks, as well as happy, to Mrs. Cleve, who, in her husband's absence, had all to settle, — specifications for building, farm and stable matters to put in order for months to come, furniture to be cared for, servants to provide with homes. It was no wonder her brother stayed on, for she needed all the help he could give her. And yet, though liking his society, and partly recognizing his worth, Richard Thorne often wondered to himself if "that fellow" would never go.

"That fellow" was the only one of the little group who saw clearly, and to him the time was not passing happily. He felt that all his own defences were down. With ardent admiration and approval he saw Rosamond in her own home ; and he knew that she was to him the fairest woman in the world. And

yet, in spite of her blushes and downcast eyes, in spite of his sister's happy auguries, he knew she would never be fair for him. Hope sometimes came back to his buoyant nature, and counselled fresh attempts, but the abiding sadness of so many years had made him wise in his perceptions. All he could do, he felt and believed, was to remove his presence from her life, and try to content his own heart with the loss.

But to him also the necessity for an explanation was plain. It could not be avoided; and though he had no hope, he delayed the words, as his sister needed him constantly; and those words, once spoken, must be his sentence of banishment. He was sitting one afternoon by the library table, with the plans for the rebuilding spread out before him, but looking at them with so grave and sad a face as to startle his sister, who came lightly in and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Harry, how weary you look! You are working over these tiresome plans, and losing all the sunshine of this lovely afternoon. Don't do it! What does it all matter? Where is Rosamond?"

"Miss Leigh has gone to walk with her cousin."

"That tiresome cousin! He is a good fellow, but much in the way sometimes. I wish he would go back to New York! Is n't that a pretty speech for a guest to make?" she said lightly. "But you are losing time, my dear."

"I am losing everything," he said. "Greta, I said

Rosamond had gone to walk with her cousin. She has taken his arm !”

“ Why not? It is very natural.”

“ Very. She is looking up in his face with a look she will never, never give to me !”

Mrs. Cleve stared at him as if he had taken leave of his senses ; then gave way to a ringing peal of laughter.

“ Harry, dear Harry ! You *are* in for it now !”

“ I have no doubt I am !”

“ You are jealous ! positively jealous ! And of Richard Thorne, of all people ! That good, middle-aged, rather heavy young man !”

“ He is on the contrary an unusually good fellow !”

“ Oh, he is well enough ; but in comparison with you ! ‘ She is looking in his face with a look she will never give to you !’ I trust so, my dear, for it is pure cousinly. The look you will win will be ‘ pure womanly ’ instead.”

“ I shall win nothing but defeat. I wish it were over and we gone. She cannot give me even a fragment of her heart ; for, all unconscious to both, her cousin has it all, and he is just throwing it away !”

“ I do not believe it ! I will not believe it !” cried his sister, with energy. “ You do not know these people as I do. Rosamond has always been like a sister to these young men, and they regard her in no other light.”

“ That is true, poor child !”

“ Poor child ! She would scorn such sympathy.

It is wholly misapplied. She thinks of no such thing."

"That is also true, poor child!"

"Harry, I am growing out of all patience with you! Rouse yourself! You cannot go without an explanation now — Why, you are half engaged! She cannot be so base, so horrid, as to throw you over now!"

"Now, Greta, I won't have that said, even by you! I understand Rosamond perfectly, and I love her with devotion. She has not sinned against me in any way, and she shall not be made to suffer. Of course I cannot leave without a final appeal, just to give her the opportunity of refusal; but that will be the last word. And oh, my dear, if you would only hurry this everlasting work, and have it over!"

And it was at this very moment that Richard Thorne, in obedience to his fancied duty, essayed to warn Rosamond. They were walking towards the farm, with the usual body-guard of dogs frisking about them, and Rosamond chatting as gayly as if she were again a child.

He began: "Windom is a pleasant man, — a very agreeable visitor!"

She assented carelessly; and then a sudden perception of purpose in her cousin's tone struck her attention, and roused her suspicion. Was Richard going to plead his cause? Intolerable!

Over her brow and cheeks rushed the burning flush, which she so hated, and which Richard had seen

before with such unpleasant surprise. He noticed it now with grave concern, and it increased his sense of duty to an aggravating degree.

"My dear Rose," he said, "I am afraid it is a great bore for you to have the house so full. It gives you too much to do. But it cannot, in the nature of things, last forever. Mrs. Cleve is getting on capitally with her preparations, and her husband is growing very impatient to have her with him. As for Windom, I suppose she really needs his help; but still, as he has other claims, — as he is, — ahem! — an engaged man —"

"Engaged! Who? Not General Windom!"

"So I understood from himself," said Richard, looking straight before him to save himself the pain, and his cousin the humiliation, of witnessing her emotion.

"You *must* be mistaken!" cried Rosamond. "He could not have said *engaged!* really *engaged!*"

He looked at her in dismay. Every trace of color had gone, and her face was as white as marble, while her eyes were fixed on him imploringly, helplessly.

"My dear, dear child," he said, "what can the plans of this utter stranger, this flimsy, good-for-nothing officer, be to you? Rosamond, you have sense, energy, self-control! Rally your forces! This man is nothing to you!"

"Richard, I don't know what you are talking about! Rally my forces? What do you mean? You must help me. It is very certain that General

Windom is *not* engaged! He has no right to say so! It is outrageous!"

"What *do* you mean! Good Heavens!"

"When he spoke to me," said Rosamond with gathering indignation, "I tried to stop him. I never thought of such a thing, never wished it!"

"I do not understand," he said. "Please explain yourself, Rose."

"Richard Thorne," she cried, stopping short and looking at him with blazing eyes, "*why* do you not understand? What *can* I mean but that if General Windom says he is engaged, he says what is not true, and you must help me to prove it is not true?"

"Great Heavens!" he groaned.

"You must see, you *must* understand that he means he is engaged to me! And he is not!"

"Great Heavens!" ejaculated he in a very different tone. "My dearest Rose, do you mean — I was very dense, very stupid!"

"I would never have spoken of it," said Rosamond. "I should have felt it dishonorable to do so! But if he speaks of it, and speaks *so*, I cannot remain silent!"

"But, great Heavens!" cried Richard again. "Do you mean that you have refused him?"

"I tried to do so at the time; it was the very night of the fire. And I have tried to forget it since, and to hope he had done so. If he has not, why, Richard, surely you as my brother can do something to help me, and send him away?"

"Certainly, my dear ; never trouble yourself about that. I can manage all that."

"Oh, then it will all be right," cried Rosamond, joyfully ; and she took his arm again, with the old delicious sense of protection. "And now, Rick, dear old Rick, I have something of real importance to consult you about."

"This is of no importance, eh? Poor fellow!"

"This is a bygone. I shall never think of it again. How glad I shall be when they are all gone!"

"But, Rosamond, do you not like him?"

"Oh, yes, very well."

"He is a fine fellow! A distinguished officer! Brave, handsome, cultivated!"

"Oh," said Rose, dryly, "I thought he was an empty, shallow good-for-nothing, just now!"

He laughed.

"I did not do him justice. Heaven forbid I should wish you to marry him! He is not your equal, in spite of many good points. But after all," he added, his surprise gaining more and more as he reflected on what he had heard, "Rosamond, he has much to offer!"

"Yes," she said.

"Position, family, money, — a great deal of money, I believe! Not that I would for one moment do you the injustice of supposing that such considerations would weigh with you!"

"They did weigh!" said Rosamond, very low.

"They did weigh! Well, why not? That was very natural, very reasonable! At your age, you would of course look at all sides of such a question before deciding. But then, Rosamond, it becomes more surprising that you should decide against him. Such an attractive man! Tell me more of the affair, if you do not dislike to do so."

"The 'affair' was a very slight one; and I hope it will soon go as completely out of General Windom's mind as it has gone out of mine. I hesitated, I considered, because I saw how unprotected and homeless I was."

"You? Never!"

"I felt that perhaps God had sent me this chance for usefulness and happiness. General Windom seemed kind and generous. His sister wished it. I hesitated; that is all. I thought about it, — well, perhaps half an hour."

"And then?"

"And then came the fire. I waked up with the smell of smoke in my room, and I never thought of it again. It all ended in smoke; and I was saved, as by fire, from making what I feel sure would have been a fatal mistake."

"And now?" asked Richard.

"Yes, *now* I want to ask you about what is of real importance. *Such* a favor! Oh, dear Richard, may I, by and by, after these people go, — *may* I have Mammy's cottage?"

"Mammy's cottage!"

"Yes. Now don't speak till I have got through. Richard, I *cannot* live at Thorncliff; don't let us go over that again! I do not love to live in strangers' houses; the teaching I do not mind, the teaching I can still do. You know I have a little money left, quite enough for such a tiny household. Oh, my dear, I am very willing to accept favors. Mammy and I will sponge upon you in all sorts of ways; crib your vegetables, and milk your cows —"

"Rosamond, what fancy is this?"

"It is my deliberate chosen plan for the future, Richard. It is my very best chance for happiness. Mammy and I will live at your gates, and I will be 'Aunt Rose' to your children and Walter's and Charley's!"

"My children are greatly obliged," said Richard, smiling. "Rosamond, you are all wrong. Thorncliff is your real, your only right home."

"And this *is* Thorncliff. Oh, Richard, if you knew how light my heart has been ever since I thought of this plan! I have dreamed of Auntie every night since. I *know* it is right."

He was moved at her tone, and at the picture of her young, lonely life untempted by the proffered wealth and ease, and yearning for this little boon of independence.

"I shall never feel cast out, then," said Rosamond, raising her dewy eyes to his. "You will marry; Charley and Walter will come and go; I shall see you all, know your plans, your hopes, your work."

I shall always find the first violets in the dell, and lie in my hammock under the oaks on summer afternoons watching the dear old shadows grow longer on the lawn. I will borrow all your books; and on winter evenings, when you are 'sated of home, of wife and children tired,' you will walk down and play cribbage with me, — that is, if Lucilla permits!"

"And who, pray, may Lucilla be?"

"Your superior woman!"

X Richard laughed.

"My dear, I cannot refuse you," he said; "you shall have your own way about it now. But in the future more or less remote, if Lucilla and I both come to beg you to move up to the homestead —"

"Ah, I shall be quite too fond of my cottage! Thank you, oh, thank you, dear Richard!" She put up her cheek impulsively for him to kiss. "I am so happy now! When I get back from New York I will move in and get settled. Did I tell you I was going to New York?"

"You never tell me anything!"

"I do, indeed! I am the soul of frankness!"

"And of obedience! You always do just as I tell you!"

"Perhaps it is n't fair to expect quite that of any woman but Lucilla," laughed Rosamond. "But I am going to New York for a while. Not to Walter's or Charley's, though both have most kindly written to ask me; but to the Van Vleck's."

"I am very glad. The old man is much under

the weather this winter. You will do him good, dear old soul!"

"Yes, he sent me just that message, — that it would do him good to have me. He is my godfather, and has a claim. I am sorry to leave my class and my organ, but it will be only a few weeks, and then I shall be here forever. Somehow all this bother and embarrassment has made me long to go away."

"I do not wonder at it. And it will be delightful to have you in the city. But, Rosamond, about your preparations. The ladies, I notice, seem to have a great variety of costumes, light things for the evening, and so forth."

Rosamond looked at him, enchanted to hear his exposition of fashion.

"And you have lost all your clothes in the fire?"

"Not quite all. The summer things and the 'light things' were safe at Thorncliff. But, Richard, all my black clothes are gone."

"So I supposed. Do not buy more."

"I miss them very much; but so long as Charley's wife and Walter's are in bridal attire, perhaps —"

"Do not buy more," he repeated. "I understand how you feel, Rosamond; but these things make no real difference. For the rest, of course my mother's clothes are all yours. She had exquisite taste, and there must be a great deal left which would be of use to you now."

"Ought I to use them?" asked Rose timidly.
"Are you sure you would like it?"

"To give them to anybody else would desecrate them," he answered warmly. "You were her own child!"

"But Walter and Charley have wives."

"I will divide her ornaments between her daughters-in-law. All the rest is yours, dear. It is not a trial, but a pleasure, I assure you, to see you wearing her clothes. It brings out a wonderful resemblance!"

"*That* is desecration," cried Rosamond. "My beautiful aunt! But thank you, Richard, thank you from my heart. It will be an immense help; and I believe, myself, it is what she would have wished. Then it is all understood; you will manage to send this dreadful man away, won't you? and the others will follow soon. Then, later on, I will come back here, and move all my treasures down to the cottage, and get Mammy to keep house for me."

She danced backward before him on the narrow path, while he walked on with his heavy downright tread.

"You are like a child with a baby-house!" he said. "How pleased the old woman will be! I say, Rose, don't forget that Linda is eating her head off in the stable."

"Oh, my poor Linda! Richard, I cannot keep a horse."

"No, you have no stable. She is better off where she is."

"You know what I mean. She is your own gift to me, and I don't want to sell her; I will give her to you."

"I return the favor on the spot. You can't give away a present; and if you kill her, and salt her down for your frugal meals, you will find her very tough eating. Why, Rosamond, how do you expect to get along in these muddy lanes without a horse? By the by, you shall have my mother's phaeton."

"Oh, keep that for Lucilla!"

"I will buy a new one for Lucilla."

"My dear Richard, you *know* I did n't mean to set up housekeeping on such a scale as that. I might better have stayed at Thorncliff."

"What I have said from the first!"

"Well, after all," said Rosamond, dexterously avoiding that snare, "you have been so good and kind in giving me my own way, that we won't fight about details — yet!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE VAN VLECKS.

HOW Richard managed matters, Rosamond never asked. General Windom's adieux were made by letter,—a letter so kind, so generous, that the tears stood in her eyes as she read it, and she almost marvelled at her own lack of feeling where such a man was concerned. Mrs. Cleve's departure was within two days of her brother's. She spoke no reproaches, and tried, in obedience to her promises to him, to show no resentment by any change of manner. But to her impetuous, demonstrative nature concealment was impossible, and the time of her departure was welcomed by both with feelings of deep relief.

And then Rosamond was alone, for Richard had returned to New York. Alone, but never less lonely! The chill of desolation was gone from the dear old rooms. She found herself singing on the stairs, as in bygone years; and every afternoon, after the busy stitching was over, and the village sempstress gone, she stole down to the lodge, which was always called "Mammy's cottage," although Mammy had so far fought off her fate, and remained

in her old quarters. She would let herself in by the key, and go through and through the tiny rooms, furnishing in imagination every corner; planning the curtains, the bookshelves, the fireplace, where now — horror of horrors! — stood a “Morning-Glory” stove.

She would walk home in the twilight for her quiet supper, and her book by the library lamp, and always the same restful happiness in her eyes. The servants noticed it with delight, and made her feel how dear her presence was to them in the old home. And Mammy, greatly exalted by her darling’s preference, would hardly let her do anything for herself.

It was very pleasant. Pleasant also was the approval which Mr. and Mrs. McMasters gave her plan. They encouraged her city visit; the rector promising to teach her class himself, and arguing that an interval of Miss Smith’s renewed melody would make the whole neighborhood welcome her return in the spring, with triumphal arches and bonfires. To have Rosamond back, and back in her own independent home, and to have her willing and anxious to teach their children, and hold a little morning school, — it seemed the one thing to be desired!

And so, all needful preparations made, — pretty clothes all remodelled and packed, with the due “variety of costumes” and “light things for evening wear,” of which her cousin had told her so soberly, — Rosamond found herself one cold day in

March driving rapidly through the streets of New York, and enchanted to be there.

Mrs. Van Vleck was one of the cousinhood, and her husband had been Rosamond's godfather. They were childless, and had always taken much interest in their young relative. In her school-girl life their house had been her Sunday home; and Mrs. Van Vleck had in those days looked forward with much eagerness to Rosamond's young-ladyhood, and planned to take the little heiress into society, and establish her brilliantly in the world.

Perhaps nobody had felt more than she the reverse of fortune which melted away these dreams, and left instead a penniless girl, with a perverse determination to be independent. She had hardly yet forgiven the silly freak, as she considered it, which had impelled Rosamond to accept Mrs. Cleve's offer, and had prevented her securing so useful and charming a companion to her own home. Ever since the fire her letters had poured in, full of argument and entreaty; and knowing that her claims, both of past kindness and of present need, were real and valid, Rosamond yielded, and accepted the invitation.

Duty and inclination for once went hand in hand. Young, charming, and fond of society, Rose felt, as was natural, no regret at the change in fate which had for a short time interrupted her plans, and made her no longer a governess in a quiet country place, but a guest in a luxurious city house. Her interest

in the two new homes formed by her brother-cousins was enough to draw her to the city, without any of its other charms of art, music, society, and many old friends.

She was fond of her godfather, besides, and she liked to believe that it was a real pleasure to him to have her come. He was an invalid, confined to a wheel-chair. In favorable weather he was able to drive in a low phaeton, and even in summer to be taken to seaside lodgings; but his great weight and size rendered it impossible to carry him up and down the stairs. His winter life, therefore, was limited to the first floor of his house, where the front room had been fitted up for his use into what he called his library, and his wife, his menagerie. Behind the dining-room was a small bedroom, where he slept under the charge of a faithful old servant. Into the library Rosamond was immediately conducted, on her arrival, by Cousin Alice, as she called Mrs. Van Vleck, and very warm was her welcome from the occupant of the large wheel-chair, as he received her into his ample embrace.

The wife was much younger than the husband; and nobody could know the pair, without a feeling of wonder at the fact that they were a *pair*. In spite of his years, and his suffering, disabled life, Mr. Van Vleck was so entirely above and beyond his chosen companion, that it needed all the traditions of her early beauty to explain the attraction of such a woman to such a man. Keen and kind, full of

humor and sweetness, drollery of perception and gentleness of judgment, he seemed to turn even the annoyances of life into entertainment; and while regarding the many shortcomings of others, their inconsistencies and absurdities, with an amused, tender tolerance, no indulgence was ever shown to his own weaknesses. He held himself well in hand, concealing his sufferings as far as possible, and firmly determined that the limitations of his own invalid life should never be suffered to hamper and shadow the lives about him.

Entirely matter-of-fact and commonplace, Mrs. Van Vleck had yet a sufficiently strong sense of duty, and of affection for her husband, to send her off to the amusements she loved, with a little sting of conscience at leaving him alone. Perhaps one reason of her strong wish for Rosamond's company was to have the excuse of a young guest to carry to the scenes of gayety which never lost their charms to her. It was her conscience only which needed the plea. Her husband required no excuses, nor would he accept any sacrifices. He cheered her on in the path she preferred, and never seemed better pleased than to be left to his books, his pets, and his faithful valet.

Indeed, Rosamond often reflected what a terrible pity it would be if Cousin Alice's scruples should get the better of her and keep her at home. The little dribble of chit-chat and not unkindly gossip which composed her conversation might serve to

amuse her husband for half an hour at breakfast; but how could a whole day of its incessant dropping be borne, even by that long-suffering quizzical philosopher?

Rosamond's welcome was not confined to the master of the house, but an equally cordial greeting was proffered by a magnificent mastiff, which rose from the hearth-rug to meet her, while a tiny terrier frisked about her feet, and a snowy Angora cat left her basket of sleepy kittens, to come at the master's call and be properly introduced to her new cousin. A large cage of little English hedge-row birds hung over a stand of flowering plants in a sunny window, and a very old parrot made a languid hop towards her, as she held out the finger he had often cruelly pecked in her school-days.

It all seemed, to her taste, very sweet and pleasant; but a look of amused perturbation in her old friend's face made her freshly aware of the expression of unsympathetic patience in his wife's countenance, as she straightened the table-cover, picked up and laid on the mantel a very much chewed rubber ball, at which she glanced with disgust, and pushed gently away the noble head of the old dog which had for many years daily offered her his homage in vain.

The next moment, however, Jerry, the little terrier, had given an unheard-of bound and brought down his plaything from the shelf, and with it a vase of beauty and value, which lay in twenty fragments on the hearth. The cat indignantly leaped

from her bed, spitting and sputtering; the mastiff pricked up his ears; Jerry, with a sharp bark of triumph, retired under the table with his recovered treasure, growling and mumbling; and the parrot enunciated slowly, and with jerky distinctness, this appropriate sentence: "Serve you right!"

Rosamond's peals of laughter were by no means subdued when her godfather, with the drollest face, pushed back his arm-chair to obtain a full view of her, and solemnly winked.

Mrs. Van Vleck, in great perturbation, picked up the pieces and looked hopelessly at them, while she exclaimed volubly at the troublesome, little beast that had done the harm.

"Put the bits into the coal-scuttle, my dear, and Pierre will carry them away!"

"They can never be mended!" she sighed. "It is ruined, absolutely ruined, — that beautiful, expensive vase! That is the most abominable, destructive little animal you ever brought into the house! He ought to be whipped, — severely whipped! I *cannot* understand how you can endure such creatures about you!"

"My dear, that is the sole subject of dissension in our married life! Few can show so fair a record. For the rest, I care nothing for the vase. Jerry naturally considered himself challenged when you put his ball up there, and he did his best. Good little dog! It was a capital jump! I wish I had your legs!"

This was his one bit of revolt, and Mrs. Van Vleck knew that she was powerless against it. He had reasoned it all out, and made up his mind that in every other spot, in every other department, the lady of the house should be supreme. But in this one thing he would have his way, and his crippled, childless, companionless life should receive whatever comfort and amusement the dumb world had to bestow.

And yet his wife never spared him one remonstrance, or concealed her displeasure at his perverse choice of companions. Her face now was almost comical in its stony despair, as she looked at her husband in his unrepentant glee, and at Rosamond dimpling over with fun at the sight of the oft-renewed battle and the never-failing triumph. "Cousin Alice," she cried, "he is just as bad as ever, — thoroughly incorrigible! You will have to give it up!"

"Worse than ever!" sighed Cousin Alice. "The very smell of this room! Rosamond, I won't ask you to stay in it another moment. Come up to your chamber and take off your things. Your trunks have just been carried in."

But at that instant the servant brought a card, and the immediate punishment to her refractory husband which she had meditated in carrying Rosamond off had to be delayed. "You know your room," she called back, as she hurried off to the drawing-room to receive her visitor.

The old man smiled.

"I am still king here, you see," he said.

"And I will be prime minister, just as I used," said Rosamond. "Dear old Kaiser!" and she kissed the dog's broad head. "Your cousin Bounce sent you his love. He is a great deal older than you, I am afraid, and has the rheumatism; but his heart is as young as little Jerry's there, and we love him better and better every day!"

"Who loves him better? Who are we?"

"Oh, everybody at home. Richard more than anybody, except myself."

"You still call Thorncliff 'home,' my child, I see."

"Oh, yes, dear godfather, it is the only home for me. I am going back!"

"To live alone in that great house?"

"No; to the lodge. We always called it 'Mammy's cottage,' and meant her to spend her old age there; but so far she has refused to take possession, on the score of loneliness. It is a dear little house, and I have ever so many pretty things of my very own to put into it and make it home-like."

"My dear, what will you live on? What source of income have you left?"

"Well, I have 'ciphered' a good deal over the details. Did you know, dear Mr. Van Vleck, that I absolutely have one little mortgage which my trustee did not get hold of? It brings in just five hundred and twenty dollars a year. Now that does n't seem

much to keep house on. But just for Mammy and me! And I shall teach school in the morning. I dare say Mina and Tina will come to me, and the children from the parsonage, and very likely the little Temples!"

He nodded thoughtfully.

"And then, whatever else we need we will sponge! There is the garden, and there is the dairy, — absolutely running over, both of them, with useless wealth; flowing with milk and honey. I think we shall certainly make both ends meet."

"My dear child, I wonder if it never occurs to you, in making your plans, that we have a home gladly open to you; that we need your cheerful company! You would be as welcome here, Rosamond, as flowers in spring. No daughter of our own could be more so."

Rosamond was moved.

"I do not forget it," she said. "I can never fail to remember your kindness. But, dear Mr. Van Vleck, let me try my plan. I have a perfect yearning for Thorncliff. I have tried, you know, staying with friends, and governessing, and boarding; and nothing feels quite right or happy but that one spot. I love every inch of the place, and I love the neighbors and the little church. Over everything hangs a sort of halo of Aunt's presence that makes all sweet and clear!"

He sighed. "My dear, try it if you like. I do not myself think it a good plan at your age. And

if Richard marries, as people think he will, it will bring a great change to Thorncliff."

Rosamond winced, but spoke eagerly. "Of course, I have always looked forward to that, and I know the future mistress of Thorncliff may not care to have a poor relation at her gates; but I will wait and see her before I judge of that. *Who* is she?"

"I hear only gossip, my child. My wife says it is Miss Heatherington. Do you know her?"

"Henrietta, or Eunice? I went to school with both of them. Beautiful girls, I remember!"

"Eunice died. It is the other one."

"I never heard of her death. It is years since I have met Henrietta. So *she* is the one, — the 'superior woman,' as I always call her, to tease Richard!"

"I do not at all feel sure that she is. I never believe half that I hear, and give the other half the benefit of a doubt. Certainly, Richard himself has never made me any such confidence."

"Do you see him often?"

"Yes; he is very good in dropping in to see me, and I am grateful, for his company is peculiarly pleasant to me, and I know what a busy man he is, and how much sought for by others."

"Richard busy? What is he doing?"

"Did he not tell you about the new agricultural paper of which he is to be the editor? Mr. Heatherington has an immense model farm somewhere in Connecticut, and every kind of experiment is being

tried there. This paper is to be his organ. He rides his hobbies to death, I believe ; but he is enormously rich, and can afford it."

"I knew nothing about it," said Rose, sadly. "The boys seldom write to me, and their letters are mere bulletins."

"That is the way with our sex. Never think, Rosamond, that because a man does n't write to you, he does n't love you !"

Rosamond laughed heartily.

"How many unsuspected lovers I may have !" she said. "For I have few enough correspondents !"

"For my own part," said her godfather, smiling, "I love you, and I never write. My hand is disabled by gout, and I leave all letters to my wife's ready pen, contenting myself with an occasional message."

Rosamond looked at him with eyes full of sympathy and affection.

"And for my part," she said, "it was the message in the letter that brought me here."

He patted her hand gently.

"Let me see. You have met your cousins' wives ?"

"Oh, yes. I went from Dan to Beersheba to the two weddings, and afterwards got Thorncliff into pretty bridal order for their visit. I did not go to Mrs. Cleve till the very night they left."

"I see. Well, then, explain Mrs. Walter to me."

"Have you seen her ?"

"She dined here once. My wife praises her highly. She seems to have a social gift of some sort,

for her house is popular. She has three sisters staying with her, and they lead a very gay life."

"Three sisters! Poor Walter!"

"Walter looks very happy."

"I am so glad. Dear Walter! But, Mr. Van Vleck, I cannot explain Louisa!"

"Then, my dear, investigate Louisa, and tell me your discoveries. She interests me as a puzzle."

Rosamond laughed. "Have you seen little Nelly?"

"Yes, indeed! I wish I had her in that basket with my other kittens! She is the prettiest of them all."

"Is Rosamond here still?" cried Mrs. Van Vleck, opening the door. "Why — she has not even taken off her bonnet, and it is luncheon time! Come up to your room, my dear; you must be tired to death!"

"Dear Cousin Alice, I am not one bit tired. Let me lay my hat down on the chair beside my cloak, and not go up-stairs till after luncheon. Are you coming in, godfather? Let me push your chair. If you only knew how delightful it is to look out of that window and see a *street*, instead of a view!"

"Well done, Miss Consistency!" laughed back the old gentleman as she carefully wheeled him through the wide doorway.

"It is quite true. For once in my life I am tired of the country. I don't want to see a fine prospect, or a snowy hill, for two months at least."

"She is perishing for the gay world," said Mr. Van Vleck. "You will be a well-matched pair, my dear. You must take the child everywhere, and show her how much better off she will be if she will only stay with us."

Mrs. Van Vleck wished for nothing better.

"If only it were not Lent!" she sighed. "There is nothing going on, nothing! The Duncans are to have a great fancy ball after Easter; but just now, except for quiet dinners and everlasting five-o'clock teas, society is at a stand-still. I never did see what was the use of Lent any way! Six weeks of humdrum life, just as everything is at its pleasantest! You and your godfather may understand the good of it all, but I confess I can't get it through my head."

Cousin Alice was that terrible thing, a thoroughly consistent woman. She had married a stanch churchman, and lived beside him for thirty years and more, utterly uninfluenced by his beliefs and untouched by his preferences. Dutch Reformed had she been born, and Dutch Reformed would she die! No other kind of reformation was possible to her nature.

"I forgot to mention," she went on, "that we are invited to Walter's to-morrow. It is a sort of family dinner, I gather, for Miss Heatherington. You will see all your cousins there. By the by, I am glad you have left off your mourning, Rose."

"My black dresses were all burned," said Rosamond, gravely. "I miss them very much, but I did not think it best to buy new ones."

"Certainly not. Why, your cousins do not even wear hatbands!"

"They are bridegrooms," said Rosamond.

"They are perfectly right about it," said Cousin Alice. "But, Rose, surely you must need some preparation before you can go out, even in Lent."

"Richard gave me all Aunty's clothes, and I had already plenty of evening finery which I had never worn. She chose it herself two years ago."

"But, my dear! The fashions of two years ago!"

"Dear Cousin Alice, what else have I been staying up in the country for, and stitching my fingers to the bone? Really, I think I am sufficiently equipped, and flatter myself you will approve of me, and that I shall be off my own mind for months to come."

"We shall see," said Mrs. Van Vleck doubtfully.

"My dear, if you have finished your luncheon, suppose we go and unpack your trunks."

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. WALTER THORNE "AT HOME."

IN spite of Richard's kind assurances, Rosamond felt afraid of paining him by her use of his mother's clothing, which had so easily adapted itself to her necessities. She knew it was right to use it. She could almost hear Aunt Gertrude's laughing voice scolding her for her hesitation, and asking what better use could be made of senseless *things* than to adorn and clothe her own child. She recognized the fact that in figure and height she greatly resembled her aunt; even the dainty shoes and gloves fitted her. But she was sensitive about the resemblance, feeling it to be quite unflattering to the beautiful woman she had so deeply loved.

And therefore on this first night, when she was to meet the three brothers, she felt relieved that a pretty dinner-dress of creamy white silk, prepared for her two years before, was pronounced by Mrs. Van Vleck to be appropriate, and properly fashioned in the newest style. They could have no painful associations with that garment, for it had never been worn as yet. And as Rosamond was still a girl, it cannot be denied that the consciousness that her

costume was very becoming, and she was looking her best, gave additional satisfaction to her mind as they descended the staircase of Louisa's beautiful house.

It *was* a beautiful house. And very kindly and happy its young master looked, as he met her with the old brotherly welcome, led her to the fire, and made his pleasant little "fuss" over her, as a cousin should.

Rose warmed at the old-time cordiality, and she looked at Walter with renewed admiration. He was quite the beauty of the family, standing full six feet three, — a very Saul among his brethren. His manner had the most gracious high-breeding, the most hospitable overflow of kindness; and Rosamond, who knew his heart to be true, simple, full of genuine charity and good-will, for a moment pronounced him, in her own mind, the most like his mother of the three.

But a moment afterward she doubted. Louisa, looking eminently handsome in her elaborate dinner-dress, sailed in with effusive welcome not quite devoid of patronage; and as Rosamond saw the young husband's look of adoring admiration, and entire acquiescence in his wife's supremacy, she reconsidered her verdict. Aunt Gertrude could never have quite received this daughter-in-law into her heart of hearts, — Aunt Gertrude, who was as wise as she was loving, as shrewd as she was sweet. No; Walter must be like his father, — of the old Don Quixote school, worshipping all womanhood, and

with unquestioning devotion placing his *Dulcinea* at its head:

She looked at Louisa as the two stood side by side. There was love between them, she felt sure; but it was like seeing a queen and a prince consort. She was supreme; he stood next. She longed more than ever to "investigate Louisa," for her own satisfaction; but this was not the time, for the room was beginning to fill. Louisa's very gorgeously attired sisters, filling a great deal of space with their ample draperies, recognized Miss Leigh with as much cordiality as their rather stiff manners could show; and then came the welcome apparition of dear Charley, boyish and bonny as ever, with his little fairy hanging to his arm. When she saw Rosamond, she forgot the proper greeting to host and hostess, and ran to her with a little cry of pleasure, kissing her rapturously. Walter stood looking at them with pleased, laughing eyes; but Louisa bridled, and her "Well, Eleanor!" did not sound propitious.

Eleanor was deaf to the implied repression. She handed Rosamond over to Charley, to receive a like affectionate welcome, and then cuddled down beside her on a sofa for a good long talk; she had so much to tell her! After which followed a low-voiced coaxing to Rosamond to come to them for a long, long visit; interspersed with confidences about the cook who could n't be taught to cook though they had raised her wages three times, and the waitress

who did n't know how to wait, but was such a good-tempered girl and looked so pretty in her caps.

Rosamond listened and smiled, feeling very much as she had done when little Wilhelmina and Christine — the Mina and Tina of her schoolroom — discussed the matters of their baby-house. She was glad to see that Charley looked none the worse for bad dinners and incorrect serving. As she looked up at his glowing friendly face, she caught his eye, and received a triumphant nod which said as plainly as words, "Is n't she a darling?" And she tried to throw a similar mute eloquence into her answering smile.

But her attention was distracted by the arrival of other guests; two quite unknown to her, and two — a very dignified old man, with flowing silver beard, and a remarkably beautiful young woman leaning on his arm. It must be Miss Heatherington; though since the days of slim girlhood, when she had been a day-scholar in the school where Rosamond had spent two winters, they had never met.

She looked at her eagerly and earnestly. Was this really Richard's choice? And if so, where could he have found a fitter? Certainly she was very handsome, beautiful, in a fair, still, Madonna style, without the *belle* look of conscious power and unwearied fascination. She looked also intellectual, and remarkably simple and refined. Rosamond dimly remembered that she had great musical talent, and a few moments' watchfulness showed that she

expressed herself well, and could listen with soft flattering attention. She seemed a real gem of womanhood in mind and manner. As for her heart, who could tell? But Rosamond's own heart told her that it could not long remain indifferent. Its fastnesses must soon be opened, its defences thrown down, if Richard were laying siege there.

There was no doubt of the eager cordiality with which Miss Heatherington was received by the lady of the house, — a most meaning and significant impressiveness, it seemed to the watchful eyes in the corner; but it was accepted simply and gratefully, and Rosamond could gather little as to the true state of affairs. She sat quite apart from the group, apparently absorbed by Eleanor's low-voiced confidences, but with her attention keenly, eagerly fixed upon the others. Where was Richard? She saw Walter glance at his watch, and Louisa turned smilingly to her beautiful guest, and was apparently asking and receiving an explanation as to his tardiness.

And then he came; and his cousin, sitting apart, watched his entrance with new eyes, and tried to imagine she was meeting him for the first time.

Yes, all the Thornes were remarkably fine-looking. Perhaps the elder brother was of the three the least handsome; but she felt sure that there was a look of power and distinction about him which few men possessed. He was not so tall as Walter and Charley, and of a somewhat heavier mould; but

something in his presence made them seem boys in comparison. Perhaps it was partly the absence in him of the happy, satisfied look which the two young husbands wore. Their faces showed no trace of loss or sorrow, although both had been deeply felt; while as she looked at Richard, she could not fail to recall the words of the Psalmist, — he “went heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother.” Was his consolation also at hand?

He had not seen her yet; but just then she heard Charley’s clear, hearty voice saying, “What a capital idea of yours, Cousin Alice, to get Rosy down here!” And Richard started, stared, and hastened over to her with outstretched hand.

There was no time for anything but a word of greeting; she heard him say, “I have only just returned to town, Rosamond, and did not know you had arrived,” and there was Louisa introducing a gentleman to her, — she did not even feel sure of his name, — and Richard was borne off, and she saw him no more until they were settled at the beautiful flowery table; and under the soft light of innumerable wax candles she at length descried him sitting as far as possible from her on the opposite side, and next to Miss Heatherington.

Her own neighbor proved to be a middle-aged *bon-vivant*, who divided his attention pretty equally between his fair charge and the numerous courses which followed each other in bewildering profusion, and an amount of luxury which her country breeding

hardly fitted her to appreciate. Fate had been kind in placing Charley on her other side, and she turned to him as soon as she could. He was nearest to her in age, and they were sworn allies.

"Well, Rosy, this is famous!" he began in his good-natured voice. "How do you like New York? You will find it good enough fun for a few weeks, but one soon tires of it. Thorncliff is worth a dozen great Babels like this!"

"I don't quite echo the sentiment," said Rosamond. "I confess to being just a little tired of the country. How lovely everything is! What a handsome house, and how beautifully the flowers are arranged!"

"Yes, pretty enough. One soon gets tired of this sort of thing, though. I'd rather have the roast beef and rice pudding of my boyhood, for steady fare!"

"I hope you would bring to it the old appetite of your boyhood!"

"Trust me for that! I'm a valiant trencherman still. Does n't Nelly look lovely?"

"Perfectly lovely. Is she well?"

"Pretty well, but she works too hard."

Rosamond stared. He lowered his voice.

"We have had the awfulest lot of servants all the winter, and they get no better by changing. It costs a lot of money to live in New York, Rosy. I say, if Dick does really marry, and settle down here, I wonder if he would n't rent Thorncliff to me; or at all events let us have old Mammy and George and

Martha down here for a few months, just to set us going in the right way?"

"You had better ask him. Is he really going to *do it*, Charley?"

"It looks like it; and she looks like it too, don't you think so?"

Rosamond looked across the table at the lovers, — if lovers they were, — and owned that they were well matched. They were talking with eagerness and animation; she wished she could hear what they said. Suddenly she saw her cousin color with gratification, and say something, apparently in grateful acknowledgment, and they both turned their eyes upon her, — Richard with a smile of meaning, and Miss Heatherington with a pretty, blushing inclination, conveying a cordial greeting, and claiming recognition. She blushed deeply herself to be caught in such apparent espionage, and turned to her middle-aged neighbor, resolved to do her duty there and let her eyes stray no more.

When the ladies returned to the drawing-room, Rosamond found herself most warmly accosted by her former schoolmate, who expressed the greatest pleasure in hearing of her arrival, — "though we did not know you had already come," she said simply. The "we" was suggestive. Her manner was particularly gentle and cordial; she recalled many scenes of past school-days, and referred very slightly, but with evident emotion, to the sister whom Rosamond had also known. "Now that I am all that papa has,

I never leave him," she said. "We have just returned this afternoon from the country. Papa goes there once in three or four weeks to look after his beloved farm, and we never close the house entirely, but keep servants there, and stay several days when we go. One of our errands this time was to have the riding horses sent up to the city. The roads are beginning to improve, and my father misses his exercise greatly. I was asking your cousin, at dinner, if you would not join us sometimes. I am sure you like riding, Rosamond."

"Yes, I do indeed. I always had my own horse in old times; but I do not at all believe I can manage it here. I did not even bring a habit. Richard's horse is in town, however; I should think he could go."

"Oh, yes, we depend upon him; but we should be so glad to have you too. When the gentlemen of the party are absorbed in farming matters," she added, smiling, "it will be a treat to me to have a companion whose tastes are more like my own."

"Do you not like farming matters?"

"I ought, for I have been well drilled. I love the country; and — yes, I take an interest, of course, in the farm and the paper, papa's last hobby; still, I do not pretend to care for it as they do."

Louisa brought them some coffee, and sat down beside them for a few moments, asking questions about the visit to Deep Dale, which it seemed was the name of Mr. Heatherington's place, — questions which betrayed to Rosamond that Richard had been

of the party there. Somehow it aggravated Rosamond quite unreasonably to hear Louisa speak of him in that intimate, sisterly way. "As I was saying to my brother!" she remarked more than once. How little reality in such a bond! And then she exclaimed, "Ah! here is my brother now!" as the gentlemen returned to the room. Richard, well pleased, came over to where the school friends were sitting, and drew up a chair. Louisa offered coffee, but he declined, and she left them with a certain meaning graciousness of manner which Rosamond hoped nobody else perceived.

Her famine was over. Not only Richard, but Charley and Walter came directly to her; and the family talk grew rapid and merry. They wanted to hear all about the fire, and made her go into every detail, praising her fearlessness and enterprise in her midnight drive to Thorncliff. Then came inquiries about old neighbors and friends, the servants, the dogs and horses.

Henrietta sat by silent and pleased, with a face which showed her sympathy. Herself an only child, this little glimpse of family life interested and charmed her, and she looked from one to another, and smiled at the laughing replies which Rosamond made to the many questions of "the boys." She described Bounce's daily pilgrimage of devotion in spite of aches and pains, wind and snow.

"He used to wait about till somebody opened a door, and then make his way in and hobble

upstairs and put his great head in my lap, whining softly, and slobbering over my hand. *You* know, Rick!"

"Yes, I know," he said; "I shall have to give him to you, Rosy!"

"Thank you; it is too late for that. He gave himself to me long ago," said Rosamond, smiling. "Still, a lingering feeling of loyalty always sends him limping back every night, sure of Martha's good supper, and no doubt with an eternally springing hope of your return."

"And oh, Rose, the kittens!" cried little Nell, who had hovered nearer and nearer, until she could bear it no longer, and fluttered over to the family corner. "I do so want one of Muff's kittens! I wish you had brought me one."

"In my muff? You should have telegraphed, Nelly!"

Charley put her into his seat, and stood leaning over her, his hands resting on the back of her chair, and she smiled up in his face.

"But really I would have telegraphed if I had known you were coming," she said. "You need n't laugh, Charley; I want one of Muff's kittens more than anything in the world! They are sure to be beauties!"

"I'm not laughing. I'll go up to Thorncliff and pick you out one the first day I can get off."

"Indeed, you won't; for I shall go with you and choose for myself," said Eleanor gayly.

Just at this moment the hostess bore down upon them with gracious smiles, but an evident determination that this sort of thing should no longer be tolerated.

"It is a real gathering of the clan!" she said. "I am sure I heard the tocsin sound. But, my dear Walter, do you think it quite fair by Rosamond to let her be so entirely absorbed by the cousinhood? She has not even had a chance to hear Miss Heatherington. Do persuade Miss Heatherington to give us — some music." She finished her request a little vaguely, not being able at the moment to remember whether her guest played or sang.

Walter offered his arm with courteous entreaties, and carried her off to the piano. Richard also half rose, with an eager look.

"Yes, go, Richard," said Louisa in a low, confidential voice. "It would never do to show remissness at this stage of proceedings!"

He reseated himself immediately.

"Walter is quite sufficient to do the honors," he said.

"I do not like our family to form such a conspicuous clique in my house," said Louisa, adjusting her bracelets, and addressing the group with impartial severity. Then suddenly turning upon little Nelly, she continued: "I am disappointed in you, Eleanor! You never help me at all. I particularly wished you to talk to Mr. Sandford, who has never dined here before, but you deserted him in ten minutes!

Charley, there are several people here whom Rosamond would be glad to know, if you would only bestir yourself."

"I think Rosamond would be glad to listen to this song," said Richard gravely, "and that we should choose a very ill time to separate now and make a bustle."

She looked at him calmly.

"You may be right," she said; "but for the remainder of the evening I trust you will all remember that this is not strictly a family party!"

She sailed away. Charley pulled his mustachios very hard, and Nelly whispered, "Is n't she horrid, Rose?"

Rosamond was choking with laughter, but the others suffered too often to see the humorous side of Louisa.

"I say, Nelly," said Charley, "let's get out of this and go home!"

"Wait till this song is ended," said Richard in a whisper.

"Oh, Charley — no, no!" entreated Rosamond in the lowest possible tone. "Poor Walter, dear Walter! Don't do anything that could hurt him! What does it matter about Louisa? She will not come here again!"

"And you shall remain 'A Rosebud set about with wilful Thorns,'" said Richard, smiling. "You are right, dear; thank you."

Charley still looked unappeased. Had not his

Nelly received an especially pointed snub? Something surely ought to be done about that!

“‘Let brotherly love continue,’” pleaded his cousin.

“And besides,” said the little bride, “we can’t go home unless you have the key, Charley. There is n’t anybody to let us in.”

“What *do* you mean?”

“Why, I thought it would do Delia and Ann good to have a little pleasure, poor things! So I gave them tickets for the theatre, and they were to lock up the house.”

Rosamond did not dare to look at Richard. Poor Charley was quite overpowered, between vexation, amusement, and unfailing admiration of his little wife. He tugged at his mustachios harder than ever.

“The dress circle?” he murmured, with a feeble attempt at raillery.

But Eleanor answered indignantly, “No, you stupid boy! I hope I’m not extravagant, whatever other faults I have! I advised them particularly to go to the gallery.”

Her husband sat silent for a few moments, and then rose.

“I’m not going off in a huff, Rosy; don’t fancy that. But I don’t think it will pay to stay here till Ann and Delia — if those are their confounded names — have sat through the play and the afterpiece, and had an oyster supper to finish off with. And the

key is in my other waistcoat pocket! Come, darling, there's nothing for us to do but go to the theatre too. Perhaps we may meet our two patronesses there, and be a happy family!"

Miss Heatherington had been singing to deaf ears, so far as Rosamond was concerned, for her whole attention had been engrossed by this little domestic scene, with its mingled absurdity and discomfort. But the two who were in the honeymoon still could afford a moment's vexation. They had only to look into each other's eyes, and all clouds vanished from the lovely childish face, leaving the usual dimpled sweetness and serenity; while Charley's cheeks glowed, and his mouth relaxed into its accustomed expression of absolute good-humor and content. He held out his hand. "Good-by, Rose; good-by, Dick. Nelly will be awfully swell in her dinner-dress, but it can't be helped. She has burned her bridges behind her!"

"Come with us, Rosamond," pleaded Nelly. "We will take you safely home."

But Mrs. Van Vleck must not be deserted; and Rose shook her head, though sorely tempted.

"No, do not go," said Richard. "I will take you to the theatre any night you like; but I do want you to hear Miss Heatherington sing. Those two made such a racket that you could n't have caught a note. Ah, there, she is going to begin again! I was hoping she would choose that song."

He sank back into his chair, this ardent music-

lover, and had no thought for any other woman, or any other sensation, until the last notes of the pure delicious voice died away. Then he drew a deep sigh. "Oh, Rose, what a gift! Why, why is it given to so few?"

Rose sighed also. She had often mourned her own musical deficiencies.

"A gift indeed!" she said. "What a relief, what a joy it must be, to be able to express in such a blissful way one's whole nature! Every shade of sentiment, — the entire chromatic scale of sensation, that one would n't dare to put in words; that no words could convey!"

"I was thinking of the intense pleasure it gives to others," he said. "Miss Heatherington never strikes me as needing relief to overcharged, unconfessed emotions. There is nothing morbid or exaggerated in her nature. It is wonderfully harmonious, and therefore calm. She is a thoroughly —"

"Superior woman," put in Rosamond slyly.

He flushed crimson, but faced her boldly.

"Yes," he said. "I think her the most entirely superior person I ever met, except my mother."

Rosamond experienced a little shock. It had come then. His mind was made up. The last of her brothers had left her. For a moment the thought overwhelmed her with a sense of desertion and loneliness; then a strong wave of resolution and undying affection swept over her spirit, toning it to fresh efforts, purifying it from all selfishness. To her pale

cheeks the color rushed back with a swiftness that also brought to her eyes a mist of tears. She put out a soft, trembling hand.

"Dear Richard, you know I wish you joy," she said gently.

It was his turn to redden now, which he did furiously. He did not touch her hand, but looked at it as if it were an adder.

"I do not know what you mean! You are totally unjustifiable, Rosamond. You jump at conclusions as absurdly as when you were ten years old! Because I think a lady a superior person, I am not confessing an attachment to her! And Heaven forbid I should be such a puppy as to imagine for a moment that such an attachment would be either desired or encouraged!"

A lecture from Richard always put Rosamond on her mettle.

"I see nothing unnatural or ridiculous in such a surmise," she said. "You are of an age to marry. You know yourself to be on the lookout for a suitable woman. When one so eminently fitting, one whom you admire so greatly, appears, what is there outrageous in my innocent remark? I ought to beg her pardon, perhaps; but I *won't* beg yours!"

He had cooled down somewhat.

"It was a mere misunderstanding," he said. "Your words took me by surprise, they so entirely outran the truth. Do not look vexed, Rose. Do not be so quick to quarrel with me. Remember what you

said to Charley; you always were a peppery little thing, but now you are absolute nitro-glycerine, positive dynamite!"

He held out his broad hand in sign of peace, and she rather reluctantly laid her slender finger-tips on it.

"There, don't squeeze it," she said, "or Louisa will be down upon us again! What has the piano been doing all this time? I have n't heard a single note. Ah, I see, it is one of the sisters; and there comes the final crash, rolling away in distant thunder, with both pedals down. I see Cousin Alice looking expressively at me. Are you coming home with us, Richard?"

"No," he said; "I am going back to the Heatheringtons', and afterwards I have an appointment at the club."

"Shall you like to edit this paper?"

"I hardly feel sure about it. I have only undertaken it for a short time, and may decide not to go on permanently. There are many considerations—"

He stopped thoughtfully. Rosamond could well believe there were.

"I will give it a trial," he said again. "It has a very pleasant side in bringing me into contact with men of my own pursuits, and more or less with the literary set in New York. This is such a marvellous city to study! I have been greatly interested in looking into the various charities of the town, and the work in the different churches. There are places

here, streets, squares, where you are in the heart of Germany, with no English word spoken; trade, education, religion,—all German. There are immense settlements of Swedes and Italians and Bohemians, all talking their own language and living their own lives. The omnipresent Irish are the only foreigners who amalgamate. They have a great capacity for adaptation. I suppose society, the sort of thing we are having this evening, is worth studying too, so far as it goes. It is the flower growing out of the mould."

Here Mrs. Van Vleck smilingly beckoned, and Rosamond was obliged to go. It was pleasant to have her cousin dogmatizing to her again, and she went away quite comforted, and with her curiosity fully satisfied so far; but who could tell how soon the change might come?

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. CHARLES THORNE NOT "AT HOME."

MR. VAN VLECK had many questions to ask at the breakfast-table about the party of the night before, and amused himself secretly by noticing the difference between his wife's stolid, heavy descriptions and Rosamond's much more delicate perceptions of humor and character. Had she been alone with her godfather, she might, between her absolute trust in him and her desire to bring all possible entertainment into his weary life, have given a comical account of Charley's *ménage* and of Louisa's strict sisterly discipline. She quite longed to see him chuckling over it all, knowing that no diminution of kindness or gentle judgment would follow from the recital. But Cousin Alice was of a far different mould, and with her, her friends instinctively kept on the safe side, which is the outside of things. If the little histories were ever told, they must be told in private.

And just as she was cogitating, and asking herself whether even to that dear old man she ought, in loyalty, to be silent, a ring came, and Charley himself entered. The evident perturbation in his face

startled Rosamond, although he tried to make his greetings in the usual tone.

"Rose, finish your breakfast quick, that's a good girl, and come to my little Nelly!" he said.

"Nelly! Is she ill?"

"She is in bed," he answered. "Not very ill, I hope; but I do not like to leave her alone, and I *must* be at the office this morning."

Rosamond rose immediately. "Thank you; no more, Cousin Alice; I have breakfasted, really I have;" and she ran out of the room. Before she had reached the first landing she heard Charley's voice.

"Wait a minute," he cried, and came springing up three steps at a time. He reached her, threw his arm around her, and swung her into the drawing-room, where he nearly tumbled down on the sofa in fits of laughter.

"Oh, Rosy, your face of horror! It is too ridiculous!"

"Charley, what on earth is the matter?"

"Oh, get on your hat, my dear child, and for Heaven's sake pack up a gown and a pair of boots for Nelly, and come quick!"

"For Nelly! Where is she?"

"She is in bed at the Brevoort House. We are locked out!"

"Did those women stay away all night?"

"I suppose so. We stood for nearly an hour knocking and calling, and trying all our neighbors'

keys, and generally making things lively. And then, as Nelly was perishing with cold, in her evening dress, there was nothing for it but to go to the hotel. It is lucky they knew me there, or we should have been turned off as disreputable characters."

"Have you been to the house this morning?"

"Yes, with no result. But hurry up, Rosy. Of course a locksmith can get the door open, but I hate to leave Nelly alone, and she is getting nervous!"

"Poor child! I'll not keep you a minute, Charley!"

"A gown" was not so easily furnished, neither a pair of boots, for that fairy form and foot. Rosamond did her best, though knowing the soft wrapper she folded would be a world too long. However, necessity knows no law; and she hurried down to her cousin, who was chatting pleasantly with Mr. and Mrs. Van Vleck on the ordinary topics of the day, and they left the good couple in entire ignorance of the true cause of the visit.

"That's well," said Charley. "Mrs. Van never even saw your big bundle. Give it here, Rose; and thank you for being so quick."

"I am glad you said nothing to 'Mrs. Van,' as you call her."

"Oh, of course not! Never wash your dirty linen in public, you know! It's quite too good a joke against us, and I only hope Louisa will never get hold of it. Dick will find out, of course; but he's a good old fellow, I don't mind him!"

"Why should Richard hear of it?"

"Oh, he lives at the Brevoort, and somebody will be sure to mention our being there, — some servant or clerk; they all know me. But I don't care!"

"Charley, Eleanor can never wear my dress. Would n't it be better to go round to the house and get the door open and bring her own things?"

"Why, it might be a long delay. I should have to find a locksmith, and such people often keep you waiting. I thought if Nelly were out of bed and you with her I could stand it better."

"I see. Let me go on without you. I know where the hotel is. What is the number of your room?"

"I really forget. And this bundle is far too heavy for you to carry. No; I'll see you safely there, and then send up some breakfast to you both. It was a shame to tear you from your chop and omelet!"

They found a very tearful, woebegone face on the pillow; but at the sight of Rose, Eleanor started up with a cry of delight.

"Oh, you good thing! You dear thing!" she cried. "Charley, was that your thought? I did n't know where you had gone, and what I *could* do!"

"*Do*, my darling pet! Why, you are going to get up and dress. See, here is a beautiful new gown, with a train! You are going to put it on, and give Rose some breakfast, and eat some yourself; and by that time I will be back and report."

"But what *shall* I do? Even if you get the house open, there is no fire and no dinner and no — nobody!" she said, with a sob.

"Better than the somebodies who were there yesterday!"

"Oh, what horrid girls they must be, Rose!" cried Nelly, as Charley disappeared. "I was *so* kind to them, and tried so hard to make them contented and happy! I used to go every day and help Ann about the dessert, and let them take turns in going out every afternoon. And now they have acted so outrageously, that Charley says they sha'n't ever come back any more!"

"Why, of course not!"

"Well, but what am I to do? And there is Louisa always wondering why we don't give dinner-parties, and return our invitations; and Charley saying we can't afford it, and he does n't choose to get into debt for twenty Louisas!"

"He is quite right! I am so glad, Nelly!"

"Glad! Oh, Rosamond!" She burst into tears. "Why, I *am* in debt! I have never paid my last month's butcher's bill!"

"It can't be very large," said Rosamond, soothingly, and refraining from a smile.

"I don't know if you would call it large. I showed it to Charley, and he said it was abominable, and the man must be cheating us. But Ann says she never wasted a thing, and that we had to get just so much to keep house at all."

Rosamond sat and pondered. Poor Charley! Surely, this one of her cousins was not quite beyond her help.

"I wish," cried Nelly, "that we didn't have to live in New York! I like the country a hundred times better. Rents are very high here, and there's nothing to be seen from the windows."

"But, dearie, Charley's business is in New York. He might some day arrange to live in the country, and come here by train; but the thing is to find out what is best to do *now*. Cheer up, darling, and let us be all dressed and ready by the time he comes back."

Nelly stole out of bed, and looked shyly and ruefully at Rosamond.

"Did you ever see such a horrid nightgown?" she said. "I had to borrow it of the chamber-maid."

Rose could not resist a peal of laughter, in which Nelly at last joined.

"Must I keep it, and pay her for it? It was clean; but, oh, look at it! Unbleached cotton!"

"Call it *écru*, and it will sound quite stylish," said Rose, still unable to look grave. "Pay for it, by all means, but don't keep it. A nice, tidy girl she must be, to have such comfortable, plain clothes!"

"But, oh, dear!" sighed Nelly, as she vibrated between bath-room and bedroom, and surveyed with satisfaction the comfortable stockings and boots which Rosamond produced from her shawl-strap to

take the place of silken hose and satin shoon, — “the question is, what *is* to become of Charley?”

“Of Charley? What do you mean?”

“Why, you can see for yourself what a bad, bad wife he has! I never get anything right, and everybody is telling me what a good mother he had, and how beautifully she managed her house.”

“She did. She was quite wonderful. But, Nelly, you have a good mother too!”

“I should think I had! Dear mamma!”

“You are going to be just like her, dear.”

“Oh, how can you think so? She would n’t have made such a dreadful housekeeper, and such a bad wife for Charley! *She* does n’t ever get into debt!”

“Nelly, such a loving wife as you, will be sure to make a good wife! Charley needs the love above everything; all the rest will come in time. You can make your life what you please.”

“Shall I ever learn to manage servants?”

“Yes, indeed! The first thing is not to be afraid of them.”

“But I *am* afraid of them!”

“I know; but you must n’t show it. And whenever you find yourself feeling so, *do* something!”

“Do what?”

“Oh, something severe and exacting! Go into the kitchen and find fault with the dinner, or order a very difficult dish!”

“Oh, Rose, I should n’t dare!”

Another peal of laughter from both.

"You see you will begin with a fresh set now. That will make it comparatively easy."

"But I've had five fresh sets already!"

This did sound rather disheartening.

"Nelly," said Rose, after a long pause, "I know something — well, a good deal — about housekeeping, because, you see, Aunt Gertrude made me learn."

"I wish mamma had made me learn!"

"But you are two years younger than I. In two years, I dare say you will know more than I do. I think I may perhaps be able to help you now. I can't stay with you, because that would not be polite to Mrs. Van Vleck; but she is always busy in the early morning, and so is my godfather, whose secretary comes to write business letters and accounts. At that time I can get away almost every day, and come to you soon after breakfast, if it would help you."

"Oh, you dear Rose!"

"Stop a minute. Are n't you a little bit afraid it would end in your thinking me meddlesome and disagreeable?"

"I should *think* not!"

"And you know I must only help, — not take it out of your hands; or you would be no better off when I go away."

"Don't go! Stay always; stay and live with us! Charley and I would be so glad!"

"Oh, no; that would never do! Did n't Richard tell you about Mammy's cottage?" And she rapidly sketched her plan for the future.

Nelly listened with wistful eyes.

"That dear little house, with the ivy all round the windows? I remember it so well, and how much I wished it belonged to Charley!"

"Why, it's the tiniest place! You could n't possibly live in it!"

"Yes, I could! There are only two of us!"

"Are you dressed, Nelly?" cried Rosamond, starting up. "I hear a clinking sound in the entry, which I suspect is our breakfast walking in!"

"Oh — oh, wait a minute! What a dear you were to remember the brush and comb! I could n't have borrowed them of the chamber-maid, now, could I?"

"Hardly. But Charley could easily have bought you some at the chemist's. Nelly, you are all ready, and as pretty as a picture! Sit down — Come in!"

She moved rapidly about the room, pulling out a table for the breakfast-tray, and folding away Nelly's evening finery; but all the time there was a load on her heart. Mammy's cottage! Charley and Nelly! Would it really do for them? And if so, who was she, to stand between one of Aunty's boys and a peaceful shelter like that? She sighed deeply, and then threw it off her mind with the thought, "It is not for me to settle. Richard will know!"

They lingered over their breakfast in the hope that Charley might arrive in time to be warmed and fed; and they were not disappointed. He came, bringing with him a whiff of fresh winter air, and flakes of snow on his overcoat; but his face looked

bright and hearty as he kissed them both and sat down for a hasty meal.

"It's all cold and empty in our nest, little bird," he said. "I don't see anything for you to do but to stay where you are for a while!"

"Was nobody there?" asked Eleanor in an awe-struck tone.

"Well, just as honest John Rogers had succeeded in unscrewing the lock of the basement door, I was aware of a shadow on the other side of the steps, and felt a watchful glare from an unseen eye!"

"What *does* he mean, Rose?"

"I knew what *it* meant, well enough! It was the guilty Ann. What had become of Delia, I don't know and I don't care. This one was quite enough! She said she had lost the key, and could n't get in last night; but she looked half tipsy."

"Oh, Charley, how dreadful!"

"I had her boxes down in a twinkling, and the other one's too. I hope she did n't have time to pilfer many of your things, Nelly. There was a policeman in the house while she packed for both. I don't think she has quite cleaned you out!"

"A policeman! In *our* house!"

"Yes; I beckoned him to come and watch the woman. Oh, she's all right! I paid her the wages, and made her give a receipt for both, and then sent her packing! Delia's her cousin, you know, and they will settle it together. And now I must go to the office."

"Oh, Charley, Charley, don't go! Did n't you bring me anything to wear?"

"Why, I thought Rose did!"

"This wrapper! I thought you said I must stay here; and how can I, with nothing to wear but somebody else's old dressing-gown, miles too big?"

Nelly was almost in tears.

"It's quite too bad!" said Charley, tugging at his mustachios with vexation. "It was dreadfully stupid of me! But I really *must* go!"

"Give me the door-key, Charley," cried Rosamond. "I'll manage somehow. Did you say Richard lived in this house?"

"Yes; I caught a glimpse of him just now as I passed the reading-room."

"Then it is all right. Go, Charley; I know you have n't a moment's time." Then, as the door shut after him, she sprang to the bell, rang it, and hastily scribbled a few lines on a card.

"Nelly," she said, "you won't mind being left for a while. See, here is the morning paper to read. I am sending to Richard to take me to your house."

"To Richard! Oh, Rose, how do you dare?" cried Eleanor. "Are n't you dreadfully afraid of him?"

Rosamond gave a happy laugh.

"Whenever I find myself afraid of him, I treat him as I advised you to treat your cook. I make him do something he does n't like! Behold the

hour, behold the man!" exclaimed she, and, nodding back a bright "au revoir" to Eleanor, she sprang to meet her cousin, on hearing his footstep in the entry. She could not help laughing at his face of bewildered surprise.

"Don't stop to ask questions," she said merrily. "Never mind how I came here. Just take me round to Charley's house, please, and on the way I will recount the thrilling adventures of the wedded infants." And, clinging to her cousin's arm as they threaded their way through the crowded streets, she poured into his astonished ear the complicated perplexities of "Baby and Mrs. Charles," as she dubbed them.

His laughter was full of bitterness.

"I do not see my way through it," he repeated once and again. "What is to be done for those two? So far as I can see, they have not one grain of sense between them!"

"One grain of experience, you mean; Charley has plenty of sense!"

"One would have thought so! But, look here, Rose; why, in the first place, did he go and marry that perfect little —"

"Don't call names!"

"That perfect little Dora Copperfield! Does that suit you?"

"Very nicely turned! But if you are going to begin wondering over Cupid's freaks —"

"No; they are unaccountable. But what is to be done? They are living far beyond their means,

with no comfort, no regularity, the prey of a set of worthless servants ! ”

“ And Louisa prodding Nelly on to give dinner-parties ! ”

“ Confound Louisa ! ”

“ With all my heart ! Richard, perhaps I can help Nelly ; and I don’t think matters are quite so bad as you fear. Eleanor says Charley will not run in debt ! ”

“ Why, how can he possibly help it ? The house-rent alone must be half his salary ! ”

“ That is bad ; but he may be able to find a cheaper one when his lease is up. ”

“ I shall help him, of course, ” said Richard ; “ but it will lead to nothing. They seem to me perfectly hopeless ! ”

“ I don’t think so at all ! What they need is to be put in the right way ; they will get into traces quickly, if that can be done. Richard, would you mind, — would it do to send for Mammy to come down for a few weeks ? ”

“ For Mammy ! For what purpose ? Why unsettle the poor old woman ? ”

“ She would think it a great lark to be in Charley’s house ! ”

“ They would rope her in for good and all ; and what would you do in the cottage without her ? ”

“ Richard, ” said Rosamond, looking straight before her, “ I am afraid I was very selfish about the cottage. I don’t want it any longer. It would do

capitally for Charley and Nelly, and solve all their difficulties at once."

He stood still, and looked at her in amazement. She tried to meet his eyes bravely and smile, but her lip quivered.

"Then all I say is," he answered, after a keen long glance at her, "that they shall not have it. It would be absurdly small and cramped for them, and cost me twice its value in enlarging and altering it. Imagine Nelly there! The gate would never be open, and she would stretch her clothes-lines across the avenue! No, Rosamond, you need n't live at the cottage yourself if the fancy has left you; but neither need you go and give it to the others!"

She was laughing and blushing with mingled relief and mortification.

"Excuse me. It was rather cheeky to make over your property even in imagination; but when you reflect on the way in which I possessed myself of it, you will not be surprised. Only, Richard, I *can't* stand in the way of one of Aunt's boys!"

Tears stood in her eyes.

"My dear," he said, "if Charley wants a house at Thorncliff, I will build him one. But I will *not* give up mine to him, as he would like, or yours to him, as you propose. Also, I will not send for my good old woman to come and be driven wild in this Babel of a town and that Bedlam of a house! Pray, was the plan hatched between you and Mrs. Nelly?"

"No; I do my own hatching. I never think aloud to anybody but you, Richard; and the way you sit upon all my little ideas is enough to stunt them in their infancy!"

He laughed. "And now what are we going to do? Am I to build the fires while you make the beds?"

"The beds have not been slept in, I fancy. No; I am going to pack a bag of wearables to take Nelly out of pawn, as it were; and you are going to send a carriage afterwards to the hotel, to take me to an Intelligence Office. By the bye, if I only knew where she could be found, Martha has a niece in town, a nice, tidy girl, good stock; she was to have lived with Mrs. Cleve but for the fire. If we could only get hold of her for Nelly! She had not found a place, I am sure, when I came down two days ago. Where *do* such people live, I wonder!"

"I will telegraph to George, and find her in the course of the day."

"Will you really? How kind! I should never have thought of that."

"Easy enough to do. But, Rosamond, *don't* go to an Intelligence Office. They are horrid places. I can't let you go alone, and really my whole soul revolts against spending my day in one!"

"*You!* Who ever thought of such a thing? No; if we can get hold of Martha's niece, very likely she may know of some decent woman to come with her. They generally do. I dare say neither will

know much; but if they are honest and faithful, they can be taught."

"Imagine Nelly teaching them!"

"No; but I will. Aunt Gertrude took a great deal of pains with me, Richard; how can I better repay it than to try to help Charley now? I will come here every day if I can, and try to show them her ways. It will be a comfort to get the baby-house launched under better auspices."

He looked gratefully at her.

"That would in truth be a good deed," he said.

"I was hoping much from your visit, Rosy."

· CHAPTER XIV.

IN CENTRAL PARK.

MR. VAN VLECK used to laugh about Rosamond's "holidays," and augur that vacation would not begin until she was settled in her "dame's school," whose hours from nine till one might be respected by her dear five hundred friends. Every other moment of her time they would demand as their right.

In truth, her life was far from idle; but the regularity which she managed to secure in her various undertakings kept off the sense of hurry, which would have thrown all into confusion. Before many days Nelly had returned to her own house and made a fresh beginning. Martha's niece Myra proved to be in essentials of the old stock, although the life of a shop-girl had rather impaired the fine flavor of serving which was so conspicuous at Thorncliff, with its old-time traditions and life-long fidelity. She wore a bang, and she resisted caps with the scorn of a freeborn Yankee. Rosamond perceived also with sorrow that the *bang* was not confined to her forehead, but extended to the cups and saucers more than was advisable.

Still, there was absolute honesty and moral worth. A few months with a stricter mistress might transform her into a treasure. It was a thousand pities that she had missed the chance of being trained at Cleveland. Easy was the rule in that charming house, but its ease and its charm were secured by an undeviating system in every domestic detail; and the little soft hand which held the reins had been in all these matters a "hand of steel in a velvet glove."

But Rosamond's words had so prevailed with Richard, that not Mammy but Martha herself was invited for a fortnight's visit to the city, its ostensible purpose being shopping; but she "put up," as Myra expressed it, at Master Charley's. Rose privately noted the phrase, and felt sure of its applicability; there was much to "put up" with in that house.

It made a propitious beginning. Martha was thoroughly imbued with love and admiration for all the Thornes; and the youngest, whose babyhood had been prolonged to the last moment possible to boy nature, was the special darling of the old housekeeper's heart. This made the stand-point of the kitchen secure in its loyalty; for Martha was a great authority with her niece. An aunt with so comfortable a bank deposit was sure to be immensely respected. Everything was right in her eyes that her young master or his pretty little wife chose to do. If Nelly forgot to order dinner, or stayed away at luncheon-time, no fault was to be found by her retainers. "A dear little young thing like that!

You're not to expect, Myra, that she should look after great girls like you and Lizzie as if you were babies! What are you good for here, if you can't go on with your work, and have something fit to eat when Master Charley comes home, without troubling that beautiful little fairy that everybody's inviting, and asking this way and that, and the prettiest and sweetest of the company always, I'll be bound! Trust Master Charley to pick out the best! And because she's that kind and gentle that she don't know how to scold, but only to smile and think it's all right, you're not to be spoiled by it, as if you was a good-for-nothing foreigner, but do all the better for the kind word! I'll never believe my brother's child is bad-hearted enough to take advantage of a kindness."

Lizzie was "the friend" for whom Rosamond had hoped, and who was duly introduced to fill up the measure of household service. A strong, bovine creature, perfectly kindly, but perfectly ignorant. Martha was in despair over her deficiencies; but Rosamond believed that the raw material was excellent, only so raw! Out of its strong, tenacious fibre might be woven a household fabric of enduring value; but how tedious the process! She used to go back a little jaded after her two hours of work, that she sometimes thought was like rolling a stone up hill; and she found a delightful rest and refreshment in the morning service of a church in friendly proximity to Nelly's house. This was a real gain, for no

help in church-going could she expect from Cousin Alice. She often coaxed Eleanor to accompany her there; but they parted at the church door, for Rosamond felt that the next hours were due to her godfather.

He was always ready for her on her return, his letters written and his secretary gone; and his eager interest in every little detail of her morning's task was the interest of a humorist, a student of life, whose keen relish for all the minute characteristic touches she could describe went hand in hand with the most indulgent, gentle judgment. By common unspoken consent they deftly changed the subject when Cousin Alice came into the room; for nothing but the bare facts ever penetrated her mind, and the facts here were so very bare! She had delivered herself once for all, to the effect that it was very strange if Mrs. Charles Thorne could not manage her own kitchen affairs without taking up all the time of Rosamond's New York visit! If she wanted advice, why did not she go to Mrs. Walter, who knew a thousand times better about such things than an unmarried girl like Rose?

So only to her godfather did Rose sketch her odd little daily experiences, and only his kind, merry eyes twinkled over her picture of Martha's high-handed displeasure, as she haled her niece forth to the china-shop, and made her pay from her own purse for all the various cups whose handles had vanished under her energetic effort to "wrench the dishes," as she

appropriately called it. She had been taken red-handed in the very act, and there was no appeal. And when Rosamond sighed over what sometimes seemed a hopeless tangle, he would cheer her quaintly. "Patience, my dear; you must not expect miracles, especially when your *chef* does the washing, and your butler makes the beds!"

After luncheon, Cousin Alice claimed her time, and carried her off to drive, or make visits, or attend the afternoon teas that took the place of gayer entertainments while Lent should last. It was all enjoyable enough, but a little middle-aged for a girl of twenty-one, and she often wished she could see more of Henrietta Heatherington, and find in her a friend, an intimate. But Miss Heatherington's time was much occupied by her father, whose constant companion she was. When Rosamond met her, she was struck by a sort of new happiness in her face, a radiance in her eyes which made her beauty irresistible; but she could learn nothing from Richard's words or manner.

His kindness to her was constant, but he was very busy; the paper from which so much was expected had not yet got to its first number, even its name not being entirely decided upon. She gathered that Mr. Heatherington was a difficult old gentleman to deal with in these matters; very autocratic in spite of his kindliness, and immensely fussy over every detail. She was sure her cousin looked vexed and worn at times, and the business seemed to be at a stand-still.

Walter was happy. That was all she could decide about him, and she told herself that it ought to be enough. With a full conviction of what it would be to either of them to have Louisa as a presiding spirit over the hearthstone, Richard and Rosamond were obliged to admit to each other that his contentment was real, his bliss unassumed. He had assured his brother that he was perfectly content; that his life was in every respect rounded into full satisfaction, its only drawback being that the mother, who would so have approved his choice, had never had the opportunity of knowing the daughter she must have dearly loved! There was no doubting his sincerity, but it was incomprehensible.

"Depend upon it," Rosamond would say to Richard, "we have found her at last,—the Superior Woman! The only trouble is that we are both so entirely inferior that we do not appreciate her when found."

She still did her thinking aloud to Richard, and in her heart recognized him as her only intimate friend. How it would be when wife and home absorbed his affections she could not tell; but she told herself if they only absorbed him enough, and satisfied him utterly, any personal loss to herself would be swallowed up in sympathy and pleasure.

And no brother could be kinder than he. In spite of his many cares, he bestowed constant thought on her pleasure, and suggested to Cousin Alice numerous plans for her enjoyment. He had urged her to

join the riding parties, which now found many favorable days of sunshine and fairly good roads. Rosamond easily refused on the score of want of horse or habit, and knew she ought not to allow herself to be tempted by the thought. But one day she was surprised by her cousin's appearance immediately after luncheon, carrying a valise in his hand, which he quietly opened, and from which he drew forth the long folds of her riding habit; after which, leading her to the window, he showed her her own pretty Linda being led up and down by a natty groom.

"Be quick, Rose," he said. "It is a beautiful day, and Mr. Heatherington and the others are just starting. I have promised to bring you to join them in the Park. Your hat and whip are on the hall table."

There was no time for words, no time for objections. Rosamond flew to her room; and as she rapidly dressed, she hated herself for the suspicion that her presence in the cavalcade was desirable as a blind to the world—perhaps to Richard himself—in concealing his attentions. She made a wry face at the thought, and then said bravely to herself: "Very well; if the only thing I can do for Richard is to be a cat's-paw, at least I need never tell any one how it burns."

As they cantered down the avenue she expressed her gratitude to him in pretty terms, and owned to her exhilaration and enjoyment in being once more on Linda's back. But it was not easy to talk much

in the crowded street. They saw nothing of their party until they had passed the Park entrance, and then Rosamond found that a third member had been added to the family in the person of Reginald Grant, a ward of Mr. Heatherington, who apparently was considered a son of the house. Richard mentioned his name as they approached the three.

"He is a capital fellow," he said; "a Creole by birth, and not a very near relation, if any, to the family. I have an idea that there was an attachment between him and the sister who died, which has made the intimacy a very close one; but I do not know that it was so."

"Why have I never seen him before?"

"He has been away most of the winter; his property is in Louisiana, and he goes there for part of the year. He is devoted to country life, and interested in farming. Sometimes I wish he were less so, for he has the most restless spirit of investigation and enterprise, and puts his guardian up to the wildest, most expensive experiments."

"I suppose Mr. Heatherington's purse can bear the strain."

"I was not thinking of his purse, but of his unfortunate editor, who can never quite arrive at the right starting-point among these changes and fancies. The truth is, I am entirely too conservative for the position, and shall get out of it, I think, as soon as I can find the proper man to take my place without disappointing Mr. Heatherington or causing him loss."

Rosamond was greatly interested; but just then they joined the others, who had drawn their horses to the side of the road and were waiting for them. Henrietta welcomed her friend with flattering pleasure, and introduced Mr. Grant. The two girls would have greatly enjoyed riding together, but Mr. Heatherington seemed to expect his daughter to keep beside him, and after the greetings were over, his "Come, my dear," was obeyed without a question, and they rode on, — Richard in close conversation with the old gentleman; and Rosamond and her new acquaintance dropped behind.

She looked at him with interest, and a very distinct remembrance of the lovely Eunice to whom he had been attached came back to her mind. Certainly the love might well have been returned, for a more beautiful specimen of manhood had never, she thought, met her view. His black eyes and hair and delicate make revealed his Southern birth; but such eyes, — so full of soft fire! Such a form! Such perfect and finished horsemanship! Certainly, fate had been kind to her sense of beauty in sending her such a companion.

He turned to her with a smile.

"What a pretty little mare that is of yours!" he said, reining in his own glossy chestnut more closely to her side.

"Ah, is she not?" cried Rosamond. "It is a joy to be on your back again, my pretty Linda. It took me entirely by surprise to see her to-day, Mr. Grant."

"The surprise was yours alone!" he answered, with smiling eyes. "We were all privy councillors, and your cousin and I went up together yesterday to Thorncliff to get your habit."

"To Thorncliff? Is it possible? Oh, how very kind of Richard — of you both!"

He smiled. "You owe me a certain amount of gratitude, I assure you; you may judge for yourself how much, when I tell you that I carried the bandbox — the *bandbox*! — all the way to town! I am repaid now that I see how pretty the hat is."

Rosamond laughed gayly.

"Never did knight a more valiant deed," she said. "Balaklava was nothing to it; but I am so surprised."

"I am going to surprise you more," he replied. "One naturally feels somewhat intimate with a lady after carrying her bandbox; but what will you say when I tell you that you are an old friend of mine? I have known you the greater part of my life."

Rosamond turned her brilliant eyes upon him in amazement.

"Oh, you never saw *me* before!" he said, laughing; "but all the same I have told you the truth. Let me ask you one or two questions. Was not your father's name Henry Templeton Leigh?"

"Yes."

"And was he not one of the engineers for the Mississippi banks?"

"Yes, oh, yes indeed! Did you know him? But it was so long ago!"

"I was a child, of course ; but he used to come to our house in New Orleans constantly, and he was very intimate with my father. I remember him distinctly."

"And I do not remember him at all," said Rosamond, sadly.

"What a pity that I should have that pleasure instead of you! He must have been a delightful man. But my most vivid recollection is that he had a photograph of his daughter in the case of his watch, — a fair-haired little girl, whose name was Rosamond Leigh. I used to sit on his knee by the half-hour looking at your face and asking for stories about you. Am I not right, Miss Leigh, in claiming you as an old friend?"

Rose was greatly charmed and interested at this picture of her young, unknown father treasuring his little daughter's portrait and showing it to other children. It gave her, somehow, a more distinct impression of him than she had ever before received.

"I am so glad you remembered it," she said earnestly ; then, smiling, asked, "Did you recognize me immediately from that picture, Mr. Grant?"

"Hardly," he answered ; "but I had never forgotten your name. I used to repeat it over and over again, and thought, as I still think, that it was almost the prettiest name I ever heard."

"Mr. Grant, my father died in New Orleans. Did you know it?"

"Yes ; but it was after I had been sent to the

North to live. My father came every summer and spent some weeks at Deep Dale; and he reminded me of his old friend, and told me of his death. It was yellow fever, I am afraid."

"Yes, you are right."

"And my father was his physician," said this new acquaintance. "He mourned much for Mr. Leigh, I know; he himself died of the same fever two years later."

"I wish I could have known him, could have thanked him!" said Rosamond, earnestly. "How strange it is to hear all this so unexpectedly! And you have been to Thorncliff too? How is it looking? Did you see Bounce?"

"Is Bounce the name of a very old mastiff who hobbled up to make friends? He does not look very agile, I am afraid. But the place is charming, in spite of muddy roads. There is plenty of snow left there, and the ivy clustering to the very chimneys, all crested with white, makes a perfect picture. It is a delightful old homestead, suggestive of permanence and family life; one misses all that which is the very essence of home, in the various wooden boxes of which the country is full."

"Oh, I know what you mean!" cried Rose, delighted. "It is, indeed, a thorough home. I love every brick of its walls and every blade of grass upon the lawn."

"Has it been your home always?"

"Ever since I was ten years old; and it was my

mother's neighborhood too, so that the country is full of friends and connections."

"I am glad Thorne is going to keep it up. So many men prefer city life, and vote the country a bore. What a good fellow he is! Not especially brilliant, perhaps, but he has a lot of good hard common-sense."

Rosamond listened with edification.

"Hardpan, I call it," continued her companion. "A very valuable part of the land, you know, to build upon, though hardly favorable to fruit and blossom."

"Is Richard hard? I am sure he is very kind."

"Oh, very kind; we are all fond of him at home. Miss Leigh, does your horse trot well?"

"Linda does everything well. Here, show your paces, my darling. Richard gave her to me when I was seventeen, and trained her himself. But I do not exactly consider her mine now, though I would not sell her. I can't keep a horse any longer."

"Give her back to him, and use her yourself; that is the best way," he said.

"Exactly what I seem to be doing," replied Rosamond, laughing.

"Now this is a nice, frank, jolly girl," thought Reginald Grant, — "a capital friend for Nita." And he devoted himself to her with cordial gallantry, and his beautiful eyes were so full of frank admiration that it arrested Richard's attention, as he turned back to point out to Rosamond's country gaze some

faint indications of spring in the shrubbery. He lingered long enough for Mr. Grant to feel himself *de trop*, and he pushed forward to join the others.

"How are you getting on?" asked Richard.

"Delightfully. Only think, Rick, this Mr. — Grant, is his name? — is the son of the doctor in New Orleans who attended my father in his last illness."

"Is it possible?"

"And he remembers my father very well himself. He recognized me by my name, for he often listened to stories of little Rosamond Leigh! Now, was not that an odd discovery?"

"Very surprising indeed."

"It is a day of surprises," said Rosamond. "First and foremost, Linda! Richard, we were jolted so on the pavements that I could n't half jerk out my thanks, but you *know* I thank you; only you ought not to have done it!"

"I think I am the best judge of that matter. It is a great deal better that Linda should be useful here, than stay at Thorncliff eating her head off."

"I am afraid her head would be a less expensive diet than New York oats," suggested Rose, slyly.

"As I said before, that is my business, not yours," he answered bluntly.

"Hardpan," thought Rosamond. "I dig down to it very often." But she held her tongue.

Then came a little cousinly criticism of her riding, and readjustment of the reins. She listened with a pupil's respect, and tried not to feel aggrieved at the pointed contrast he drew between her riding and Miss Heatherington's, whose horsemanship fell not one whit behind her other accomplishments.

"She is a beautiful creature, certainly," said Rose, "and never more so than at this moment."

He assented silently, — she thought, with a little embarrassment; but at that moment an unwelcome and unexpected sight brought the flush of embarrassment to her own cheeks. A dog-cart whirled rapidly past, — a lifted hat, a searching glance from keen, sad eyes. It was over in a second, and she realized with dismay that General Windom was in Central Park instead of Santa Barbara, as she had supposed.

Richard looked after him, as he vanished. "So that fellow is turning up again!" he said.

Rosamond rallied herself from her astonishment.

"It is disagreeable," she said, "but he may be only passing through town; perhaps we shall not even see him!"

"I take it I shall see him. A man cannot spend four weeks in another man's house, and not look him up afterwards in town. However, I dare say he will keep out of your way."

"I hope so, I am sure. Richard, I never asked you how you did it."

"No; so I never told you. It was all very simple,

and rather distressing. I told him how you felt about it, and he took himself off; that was about all."

"I think I knew as much as that before," said Rose, smiling. "He behaved very well, and I do hope he is n't staying in New York."

The hope proved illusive, although for a week she only caught a glimpse of him twice in the street and once in church. Then came a small musical party, where Henrietta sang, and the sight of Richard Thorne turning the leaves for her, with a face of rapturous devotion, seemed to change the current of General Windom's purposes. He approached Rosamond, who had not been aware of his presence in the room, and fell into friendly, simple talk about his sister, and her winter experiences, and the journey to California. It was a great relief to see him so thoroughly his old pleasant self; and Rosamond felt that if she could only be sure he was entirely cured, she might enjoy having a good friend so near.

Louisa seemed struck by his appearance, and came up with cordial greetings to Rosamond, evidently bent on an introduction. Then she beckoned to Walter to come and renew the old acquaintance, and Rosamond felt as if the toils were tightening about her, when she heard them invite him to a dinner the very next evening, apologizing for the informality, — a dinner to which she had already promised to go. She hoped, she trusted, that he

had returned from California an altered man, and entirely heart free; but how could she be sure? At all events, there was no escape for her now. Nothing but serious illness would excuse her absence; anything less than that Louisa would never forgive!

CHAPTER XV.

INVESTIGATING LOUISA.

THE next morning a sudden resolve came to Rosamond as she left the house for her usual morning duty, and instead of turning her steps in the direction of Charley's modest side street, she walked quickly towards Madison Avenue, arming herself with a bunch of fragrant violets for Louisa, and bent upon being cousinly and informal. In her heart of hearts she knew it was only an excuse, and that her real desire was to "investigate," as her godfather put it.

It was not mere curiosity, but an intense longing to know, to understand, and to do justice to her cousin's wife if she had judged her unfairly, and taken an unfortunate manner for graver faults of character.

No amusement would come of it. She would add no humorous sketches to Mr. Van Vleck's character album, as he called it. In silence she must forgive and condone, if it proved only manner that made Louisa so unspeakably irritating to her. In deeper silence of love and pity for Walter, must anything more serious be hidden forever.

The servant seemed undecided as to admitting her at so early an hour; but Rosamond made her way in with easy nonchalance, saying, "If my cousin is at home, perhaps she will let me come up to her morning room for a few minutes." She waited for some time in the handsome, empty drawing-room before she was espied by Walter from the entry. He was on his way out, but stayed his steps, surprised and pleased.

"You here so early, Rosamond? Nothing the matter, I hope!"

She smiled as he kissed her.

"Nothing is over the matter with me, you know," she said.

"I am thankful to know it. I believe I was thinking of Charley's sweet little wife. She looks so delicate. I am glad there is nothing wrong."

"It is very early; but I was walking, and I brought some violets for Louisa. Do you think she would like to see me?"

"Like it! I should think so! Come upstairs to her room. I have quite longed to have you know my dear wife better, Rose, kind sister that you have always been. It is very good of you to come in this informal way."

"I am coming formally to dinner to-night, you know. I thought possibly there was something I could do to help Louisa. I should have offered long ago, but with so many sisters. . ."

"Yes, we are full-handed; although there never

little housekeeper at the helm. This dinner, I understand, is not a very serious affair; it is given to some of my colleagues. Louisa is wonderfully helpful and sympathizing in my profession, and rightly judges that the *esprit de corps*, which is such a help to college work, is greatly advanced by social attentions and frequent meetings. Some of our men are delightful fellows, and I don't think the old fogies are to be in force this evening. But come up, dear. I shall have to leave you together for a comfortable gossip. I am sorry I cannot stay myself."

He led the way to a beautiful, sunny room, filled with every kind of luxurious furnishing and adornment. Rosamond was aware of a rush and a slight as the door opened, and Louisa's voice from the dressing-closet asked, "Who is it? Walter! I did not hear you knock!"

The voice said plainly to Rosamond's ear, "Even you must not enter without knocking!" but no such meaning reached Walter's apprehension. He stood still and laughed.

"Come out of your hiding-place, my dear love," he said. "I have brought up Rosamond from the cold parlor. Did Philip forget to tell you she was there?"

"No; but I could not conveniently see her just then," said the cool, repressive voice. "I am trying on my evening dress, which is shamefully mislaid. Perhaps Rosamond will excuse me for a few moments.

Rosamond felt much humbled, but Walter saw nothing wrong.

"We don't call Rosy a visitor," he said, smiling affectionately at her, "and we all know she can't come at a wrong time. She is a Heaven-sent help to you, Louisa, — a regular adept in making things fit rightly, I remember of old. I only wish I could stay myself." He shook hands with his cousin, and, with a laughing nod towards the closet door, disappeared.

The door remained nearly closed — dead silence !

"And darest thou then

To beard the lion in his den? "

thought Rosamond. "I must dare; there is no escape. Louisa!"

"Well?" answered the crisp voice.

"Please forgive me; it was all Walter's fault. Men always take things for granted so provokingly, you know; he brought me up willy-nilly, and here I am."

"I will come presently," answered the voice; and after a short delay Louisa swept in, attired in a beautiful evening dress of white satin and lace, and drawing a fur-lined, snowy opera-cloak over her magnificent shoulders and round arms. She greeted Rosamond with the regulation kiss.

"Is anything the matter, to bring you so early?" she asked.

"Nothing; I only took my morning walk in this direction, and brought you some violets."

"Thanks. I am sorry to receive you in such an absurd costume, but I cannot take it off until my maid comes to see what needs alteration, and she has not yet returned from an errand I sent her."

"Can't I help?"

"No, thank you. Cécile will be here soon. The dress fits disgracefully. I will not submit to such treatment from Madame Desmoulins. This is the second time she has sent me badly fitting work, and it shall be the last. I shall withdraw my custom entirely."

"Why," said Rosamond, with round eyes, "I never in my life had anything sent home from a dressmaker that did not need some alteration; and it was just the same with Auntie!"

Louisa looked at her loftily.

"Country people have to submit to things of that kind, perhaps," she said. "I have never lived in the country myself. I am afraid I should not like it."

"I do not suppose you would."

"Of course, if it were absolutely necessary, I could bring my mind to it," said Louisa. "But so far I have never been able to see that it was my duty. It depends entirely upon Richard."

"Upon Richard?"

"Certainly. Somebody must keep up Thorncliff. When Walter first told me of the old family place, I felt it might become my duty to live there. It would be a trial, of course; but I hope I can bring my mind to anything that is clearly a duty."

"But, Louisa, I don't understand. Thorncliff *belongs* to Richard!"

"I am aware of that, but I suppose he would be willing to rent it to us rather than sell. I should dislike to disturb my investments, and put so much capital in a place that I really do not care to own."

"Do you mean that Richard wishes to dispose of Thorncliff?" asked Rose, completely bewildered.

"I have not yet spoken to him on the subject; I preferred to wait awhile longer. But as Miss Heatherington herself told me that she should never leave her father, it is manifest that during his lifetime their home must be at Deep Dale, and Thorncliff will be of no use to them."

"You mean in case of their marriage," said Rosamond.

"I should think there was no doubt of that event," answered Louisa.

Rosamond was relieved. She felt sure that if he married six heiresses, Richard would never sell his birthright, or install Louisa there. Really, the conversation was unexpectedly interesting; more so than she had dared to hope.

"I dare say it will be a bore to Richard to make the change," continued Louisa. "Perhaps that is what is making him so slow in coming to the point. If I were in Miss Heatherington's place I would not stand it, — not for a moment!"

"What would you do about it?" asked Rose, smiling.

“I cannot tell, without knowing all the circumstances. But there is always plenty to do, and I have had a great deal of experience. However,” she continued, “people must manage their own love-affairs, or mismanage — I can’t do everything; only the delay is very tiresome and vexatious to me. All the best houses in Newport will be snapped up while I am waiting for people who do not know their own minds.”

“Do you mean to spend the summer in Newport?”

“I should prefer it, on my sisters’ account. Of course, it is my duty to give them every chance; but it is impossible to arrange until I know whether Thorncliff is to be thrown on my hands. It is very vexatious. I do like people to know their own minds!”

“Do you always know yours?” asked Rose, much amused.

“Always. My sisters are sometimes uncertain; but while they are with me it is of less importance, as I can decide for them. That is one reason why I asked them this winter. Personally, I think I should have preferred to be alone with Walter the first year; but at their age it is very important to have them under the right influence.”

“Does it leave your mother alone?”

“She is spending the winter with my married brother. I did not think it worth while for her to keep up that expensive establishment while my sisters

were away. Of course, they bear their share of the expense here, and it would hardly be fair to expect them to do so there too."

Rosamond had nothing to say, but her wonderment increased.

"I did not care to begin on any scale that must be changed when they left me," said the frank Louisa. "So I took the house on my hands and left the stable expenses to them. For my own part, I dislike riding, and I can later on have as many carriages as I need from a livery stable. By the bye, Estelle tells me she sees you nearly every day in the Park. Have you a horse in town?"

Rosamond had indeed met the cavalcade almost daily, with its many attendant cavaliers and well-appointed grooms. She felt that Louisa's surprise was not unnatural, though her own face flushed under the calm scrutiny.

"I had this little mare at Thorncliff years ago," she said. "I consider it now Richard's rather than mine. He insisted upon sending for it for me to ride."

"Do you think that judicious?"

"I do not, if you mean as a matter of expense to Richard."

"That is his own affair. No; I was thinking of his courtship. It only hinders and confuses matters to have a second lady at hand; and really, the delay is most vexatious!"

Rosamond laughed. She was determined not to

be vexed, although Louisa was worse than she had feared.

"Now, on the contrary," she said gayly, "I had flattered myself that I was of real use in my part of 'confidante in white muslin.' I draw off Mr. Grant's attention, and sometimes even Mr. Heatherington's, and leave Richard a free field!"

"Mr. Grant! Oh, that young cousin! Is he pleasant?"

"Delightful!" said Rosamond, mischievously.

"He is a *parti*, of course. I had thought of him once or twice for — However, if you see so much of him —"

"You are most mysterious, my dear!"

"I will not explain yet," said Louisa, smiling. "But I think you will find that I am anxious to do my best for Walter's family, although, of course, having undertaken the responsibility of my sisters, my first duty is to them. Please tell me all about General Windom."

Rosamond would have done a good deal to keep the flush from her cheeks.

"All what?" she asked.

"You must know him very well, after being with his sister so long, more on the footing, I believe, of friend than governess."

"Yes, pretty well."

"Is he engaged?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Rosamond, you need not color so much. I

assure you I will not interfere. If it is General Windom instead of Mr. Grant, why, all right! You can't have both, you know!"

"And I don't want either!"

"That is the way girls talk," said Louisa, disdainfully. "But it is very foolish."

Rosamond grew entirely grave.

"Louisa," she said, "General Windom was engaged to a lady who died. So far as I know he has no other ties formed as yet."

"I was thinking of Belinda," said Louisa, with her remarkable and unflinching frankness. "She is older than the others, and ought to lose no time. Of course, there is no lack of suitors for girls known to have large fortunes; but I am very particular. Money I care nothing about; there are plenty of fortunes in Chicago, if they wished to settle there. But I prefer the East; and I set a very high value on position and prestige."

"Louisa, tell me about your engagement."

"Which engagement?"

"Why, to Walter!" said Rosamond, coloring deeply with surprise at the admission.

"Oh, I thought you might have heard of that other foolish affair. I was very young, and made a mistake, that was all. The moment I saw Walter, I felt what a fatal blunder it was." She stopped, and to Rosamond's amazement and satisfaction a tide of the deepest crimson swept over her face, brow, and half-covered neck, and she turned her head away,

but not till Rose had detected a sort of tender mist as of tears in her eyes.

Her sympathy was instant and eager.

"Oh, Louisa," she cried, "how fortunate for you! There is nobody like Walter."

Louisa seemed to try to subdue her emotion before she spoke.

"You are right," she said at last. "There is nobody like Walter! I had heard of him often from friends; I had heard a great deal about him and his mother."

"About Aunt Gertrude?"

"Yes. The Marvins had known her. They told me about her being one of the Van Rensselaers, and your uncle once Secretary of State, and how they lived in their old country house, spending very little money, but associating always with the best people."

"Why, of course; they *were* the very best people!"

"I was interested in hearing about it, but I never dreamed it would make any difference to me. But when I saw Walter —"

"Yes, dear."

"Why, I saw what a foolish, wretched mistake the other affair was, and I broke it off; that was all."

"But what came next?"

"Next came my engagement to Walter. He knew about the other affair; I told him all about it. I never conceal things. And there was no reason why our marriage should be delayed, for he had just

accepted this position in the College of Engineers. I would have preferred, of course, a different career for my husband, — diplomacy, and a Washington life, for instance ; but it will do for the present. Later on I dare say matters can be improved. It all depends upon knowing your own mind, you see," she said, smiling.

"We are all so proud of Walter's position," said Rosamond.

"Indeed ! I had not thought of it in that light. I should never, of course, have married a man of inferior rank as to either birth or talents."

"Louisa, you have won a heart of gold. There is nobody so sweet and generous and true, through and through, as dear Walter ! You ought to be a happy woman."

"*I am* a happy woman !" said the bride in a low voice ; and again came the softening of face and manner which had so unexpectedly soothed Rosamond's worst prejudices. "I try to be a help to him in his profession, and to establish his influence there, even though I hope for better things in the future."

Just then the entrance of Louisa's maid made a diversion, and the two parted with more cordiality than they had met. As Rosamond thoughtfully pursued her homeward way, she admitted to herself that in spite of all the sharp stings and pricks of such a conversation, and notwithstanding the firm resolution she had made never again to bring upon herself such unspeakable discomfort, she had not

“investigated Louisa” quite in vain. One discovery she had made, which atoned for much; one vulnerable point had discovered itself in that panoply of serene satisfaction, — Louisa was in love, honestly and genuinely in love, with Walter. So long as this was the case, much might be forgiven to the wife, much might be hoped for the husband. Louisa had certainly proved a great deal worse than Rosamond had feared; but in this one respect, the most essential of all, she was better than she had dared to hope. When she rejoined her godfather, he was struck by her silence; and while he asked some questions about “Mrs. Walter,” she only shook her head and smiled.

“Ah, my dear,” he said, “I see I am to hear none of your experiences to-day; and I will be very discreet, and ask nothing: only one thing is evident, — you have returned a sadder and a wiser woman.”

CHAPTER XVI.

A TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP.

NOT even to Richard could Rosamond tell any of her conversation with Louisa. It would have been impossible, of course, to quote what had been said of his marriage; and she would have shrunk from offending him by what he would consider the unspeakable presumption of offering to take Thorncliff off his hands. As her own offence cooled, she vibrated back to the natural attitude of her mind,—a tendency to see both sides; a “put yourself in his place” instinct, which convinced her that there was a redeeming flavor in Louisa’s words. Louisa did not like the country; it would be a trial to live there, as she confessed. Therefore this fantastic idea that her money might be needed to save the family home, that her strength might be necessary to float on high the pennon of the Thornes, had an element of generosity, through all its absurdity. But it was very certain that not in that light would it appear to the owner of Thorncliff.

Unwelcome reflections came to her mind as she pondered over Louisa. There was a possibility that her clear, hard eyes were gifted with a terrible

foresight. If the attachment between Richard and Miss Heatherington were really ripening, and if the serious obstacle were really to arise of the father's claims backed by the daughter's promise, what better could Richard do? It might be that for many years his home would perforce be beneath his wife's roof instead of his own, and that he must bear the disappointment with what patience and contentment he could command. If he could bear it at all, and for that sweet woman's sake give up all he most valued, then, indeed, there would be no doubt of the absorbing power of his love.

And if all this came to pass, why should not Louisa reign in the old place? It was far too heavy a burden for Charley to carry, in spite of his boyish wishes. Walter, if he wished to live there, would no doubt be greatly preferred to any stranger.

What then would be Rosamond's own future? The life-plan she had so happily sketched, the contented mornings of teaching, the summer eves and winter walks in the dear old home, all faded into misty distance. To live at Louisa's gates would be an impossible wretchedness! Far better to leave the country entirely, and devote herself to her godfather's comfort; or seek a governess-life among entire strangers!

There was nothing to do but to wait. By good fortune she was on the spot, and could watch events, and shape her own life to meet them. Her thoughts dwelt much upon Henrietta, of whom she saw little,

in spite of daily meetings. She had felt sure that the happy look in her beautiful face had been lately overclouded, and her quiet manner had almost a pathetic gentleness. Were rival claims rending her heart and spoiling her life? Ah, who could help her?

Again there was nothing to do but to wait and watch, and snatch from fate every possible moment of brightness. Every day came the pleasant ride, the cordial greeting, the pervading consciousness of Richard's brotherly care and kindness; and very enjoyable, merry talks with Reginald Grant, who was more frequently by her side on these excursions than her cousin. Every day, too, brought some meeting with General Windom, who had somehow established a footing in the house, penetrating even to the library itself, and winning from her godfather most cordial welcome, and renewed invitations to come often. She began to have a hunted feeling, and again to wonder at times if every other door would be shut in her life, and fate compel her to pass that threshold. If she only *could*! What a solution of all her cares and puzzles! She believed that many girls situated as she was would easily persuade themselves into the idea; but she felt like the heroine in the "International Episode," who simply says "I could n't," and every one recognizes the finality of the word.

She wondered how Belinda would act in her place. There would be no "could n't" there,

and an approving world would realize that she had secured a brilliant position, an excellent husband, and every chance of happiness. Rosamond herself would think so, and feel that such a girl was to be envied. But without conceit on her part, certainly without effort, she perceived that there was at present no question of Belinda. General Windom had not given up hope.

Everything was against her. Cousin Alice was loud in his praises and constant in her hospitable welcome. Mr. Van Vleck was very fond of leading the conversation to the perfections of this inconvenient officer, declaring that it was a pleasure to know that such a man could be found in New York, and that he had not enjoyed any one so much in years. Richard looked grave, and admitted to her that he was afraid "the fellow" would give her trouble yet. It was too bad she should be bothered; but what was to be done when a man says that he will not give up hoping and trying, so long as the lady of his affections is not positively betrothed to another?

"Do you wish it, Richard?" asked Rosamond, wistfully.

"The question is, what you wish," he answered. "No; I do not fancy the idea at all. And yet, I cannot understand why I feel so. If your own heart turned to him, Rose, I would try to be reasonable, and give you my blessing."

But her own heart was far from any such change.

One beautiful afternoon Rosamond stood behind the tendrils of the leafy screen in the library, vaguely expecting her horse, and yet not sure about the plan, for she had not seen her cousin for two days. It was a little fretting, this uncertainty. She felt altogether fretted and jaded. She had found Eleanor in bed with a headache, and much disposed to find fault with Myra, who, now that her aunt had returned to the country, developed an unforeseen tendency to take the reins of government into her own hands. If it could only be left to her, things might go better; for manifestly Nelly's little gentle hold was hardly sufficient, and she was often ailing, which did not improve matters. But the boyvine Lizzie showed an unexpected spirit in refusing to bear the yoke or respond to the goad when Myra assumed the driver's place. She was in open rebellion, — not peppery, but fatally cool and stubborn.

"I did n't come here to be bossed by the likes of she," was all she would say; and she said it with a face set in unconquerable obstinacy.

Rosamond reasoned with her in vain, and scolded Myra in vain.

"Somebody must give the orders," said that young person, enunciating from her high horse an unanswerable truth. "If Mrs. Thorne is sick, we are not to bother her, Aunt says; and if she is n't sick, why like as not she goes out and forgets about things; and how is the house to go on, I ask you, if nobody can't say a word either to the lady in the

parlor or the lady in the kitchen?" She threw up her chin with a sniff of defiance.

It took a long course of quiet reasoning on Rosamond's part to bring the young woman into a more humble state of mind; and she did not leave until she had exacted a promise not to quarrel with Lizzie or exceed her own authority. Lizzie, with exasperating condescension, offered to overlook it this time, provided Myra would keep herself to herself in future. She was not to be put upon. "I takes my orders from Mrs. Thorne, and from nobody else in this house," was her ultimatum. "If she does n't order lunch, no lunch will be cooked by me!"

"You are entirely wrong about that, Lizzie. There is always enough for lunch and breakfast in the house; and a good, reliable cook will take the care off her lady's mind, and send up something comfortable, even if she has n't had any particular orders."

"I takes my orders from Mrs. Thorne, and nobody else," repeated Lizzie, with significant brevity.

Rosamond perceived that she could go no further. She could not keep house for Nelly, neither could she assume an authority over her servants. Nelly was so delicate that it would not do to worry her with too much advice and suggestion. And if in these early days, with only good-natured easy Charley to be considered, it was a hopeless tangle, and the tiny household could hardly go on without falling into discomfort and debt, how would it be when its helpless little mistress should have the

cares and fatigues of motherhood added to her other burdens? If Nelly's own mother could but come! Rosamond remembered her as a sweet, sad little woman, with gentle, retiring ways,—not a mother-in-law to be dreaded in a home. But she had not only her husband, but an invalid boy, a little deformed child, whom she never left, and apparently no hope could be expected from that quarter.

Rosamond felt in her heart that it might yet happen that her first duty would be to Charley and his wife, and her own individual wishes have to be laid aside. It was not exactly pleasant, at twenty-one, to take the spinster's place in the family, and be Aunt Rose to the rising generation. She could do it if necessary; but she felt vexed and dispirited as she stood at the window watching for the appearance of her horse. A good gallop would, she hoped, disperse some of these mists of gathering discomfort; and in hope of that gallop she begged off from Cousin Alice's round of visits, and watched her safely out of sight, while her godfather disappeared for his nap and left her alone.

Suddenly came a welcome sight, — even more welcome than her own Linda. It was Henrietta in a charming open carriage; it drew up, and the footman sprang down to open the door. But Rosamond had been espied meanwhile behind her ivy screen, and Henrietta beckoned and smiled. Rose threw up the window.

“Are you not coming in?” she asked.

"Not if you will come out instead. I hoped you would drive with me — if you have nothing better to do."

"Oh, very gladly; I will only keep you waiting two minutes."

She flew upstairs and donned her prettiest cloak and bonnet, to do credit to the beautifully appointed equipage and its lovely mistress. Each time she met Henrietta she seemed more beautiful than before. Everything she wore was perfect in taste, and so entirely becoming as to seem a part of her, like a well-chosen frame to an exquisite picture; and as unconscious she seemed of her charms as the Madonna on a painted canvas.

This was delightful. She squeezed Henrietta's hand as they drove off, and realized with delight that at last she had secured her for a long *tête-à-tête*. There was no room in the pretty open victoria for the all-absorbing father, with his untimely "Come, my dear;" no room for the adopted brother, with his beautiful eyes and gallant speeches; no room, thank goodness! for General Windom, who had lately filled up the measure of his offences by appearing on horseback in the Park and joining their party; no room even for Richard!

"Rosamond," said Henrietta, "I am perfectly delighted! They have all gone to Deep Dale for the night, and at last I have you to myself."

"It was most considerate of them. Did Richard go?"

"Yes; and I promised him I would look after you."

"I am so glad. You have seemed to me a sort of unattainable good, that I was always hankering after, — a cluster of grapes, or a lovely rose, just tantalizingly out of reach."

Henrietta laughed with girlish gayety.

"What pretty speeches, Rose! One would think I had a young gentleman seated at my side, instead of only a girl of my own age! You can't think what a joy those very words convey to me, — 'A girl of my own age!' I feel always so terribly old and responsible, trying to understand all that papa is interested about, and to be a companion to him. I can scarcely realize that I am only twenty."

"Younger than I!"

"Yes, a little younger. But if it would make papa happier to have me sixty, I would put on cap and spectacles, and act the part at least. He has nobody but me, you know."

"Yes; there is no closer bond than that between an only parent and an only child."

"There is only one closer bond," said Henrietta simply, with a beautiful blush. "But I spoke of this, Rosamond, to let you know that it has been a daily disappointment to me to be near you and not quite with you, — a sort of illusive vision of youth and sympathy just beyond my grasp."

"Dear Henrietta, the pretty speeches are on your side now."

"Their prettiness is in their sincerity. But, Rose, my name is *such* a mouthful; I have longed to ask if you would call me Nita. My very most intimate friends, you know, call me that."

"I remember hearing Mr. Grant call you Nita once, and I thought it so pretty."

"It is the name I best love. My Una always called me so."

"Thank you for the permission," said Rosamond.

"I remember her so well. How beautiful she must have been as she grew up!"

"She only grew to be seventeen," said Nita, sadly.

"A lovely child, fresh as a flower, and so wonderfully pretty. I think I shall never again see anything so perfect as the curve of her lips, and her eyes so darkly blue under their heavy fringe. Do you remember her eyelashes?"

"I am afraid not. It is only a picture I carry in my memory of fresh, lovely girlhood and innocence and sweetness. Have you a portrait?"

"Oh, a dozen at least! The one I like best is in my room at Deep Dale. I will show it to you."

Rosamond was silent.

"I long to show you my home. I have a plan very near my heart, Rose, to which I hope you will not say no."

"I think I could hardly say no to anything very near your heart, dear Nita," said Rosamond, affectionately.

"That is very sweet of you. My plan is this: we

are all going down to Deep Dale next week, and we want you to come with us."

"How very kind! Is Richard going?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! Papa and he have so much to settle; we could not go without him!"

"It is Holy Week."

"That is the very reason. I could not bear to miss our own dear little church, with its daily services; and Easter would not seem Easter unless I could go to my graves. But it shall not be a sad time for you, dear Rose, if you will come. I never speak of these things. Papa is easily depressed, and could not bear it. In fact, it would greatly help to make the home cheerful, if you would come; I tell you this because I know you have a passion for being useful to others, and I want to appeal to your weak point."

"I will come very gladly," said Rosamond, "if I can be spared by Cousin Alice, and if Nelly does not need me."

"Only for one week, you know."

"Oh, I think I could get away," said Rosamond, her spirits rising into an ecstasy of relief as she suddenly realized that she would escape also from General Windom. She saw him at that moment, for they were bowling smoothly through the Park roads; she watched him looking eagerly at the various equestrian parties, and spurring forward to obtain a nearer view of some beautifully mounted ladies in front of him. And then, with delight, she saw one of them turn and smile and address him, and —

whether willingly or not she neither knew nor cared — he was a captive in the toils of Belinda.

She turned with an irrepressible laugh of amusement.

“Poor man!” said Henrietta, softly.

“I will go!” said Rosamond.

“I am so glad; I wish I could keep you longer than that week. I wish I could keep you always!”

“Nita, it is very strange, but several people have said that to me.”

“People on horseback, for instance?”

“I don’t mean that sort of thing. But Mrs. Cleve, his sister, wanted to keep me, and Mr. McMasters and his wife wanted me there. And here is my godfather, who really needs me, and Nelly.”

“My dear Rose, they will pull you to pieces among them, and I am sure I should snatch for my share. Are you not glad to be wanted and welcomed by so many?”

“Indeed, I am grateful, though sometimes embarrassed.”

“Rose, they say two women can never meet without talking about clothes. What are you going to wear to the fancy ball at the Duncans, in Easter week?”

“I don’t know exactly. Cousin Alice will be greatly disappointed if I don’t go; but the costumes are sure to be superb, and I don’t want to have much expense, while I know that Louisa, and in fact all my cousins, will much disapprove if I go in

an easy, makeshift way, and add one more to the crowd of Flower-girls or Gypsies."

"Or Night or Morning," said Nita. "No, dear Rose, your lovely dark eyes and hair shall never be sacrificed to such commonplace devices. Do you know, I was hoping you had not yet taken any trouble about it, for I have a really beautiful Egyptian costume that I have never worn, and I wish very much you would use it!"

"But, Nita, shall you not need it yourself?"

"No. I am sorry to say that after I had sent to Egypt for it, and it was all complete, — head-dress, coins, ornaments, — Reginald pronounced it unbecoming; so I never wore it."

She spoke very simply, as if there were no gain-saying such an authority.

"I do not believe anything could be unbecoming to you," said Rosamond.

"On the contrary, I am very limited as to colors and styles. I have none of the *espiègle* quality, which makes you carry off anything not carefully studied."

"My poor clothes!" laughed Rosamond. "What will you wear to the ball, Nita?"

"I don't know yet. Rex undertakes it, and is going to keep it a secret."

"Are you sure you will like it when done?"

"Oh, perfectly sure; nobody has such taste; and if the others like it, I shall be contented any way. But about the Egyptian dress. I have set my heart

upon your having it. I know it will fit, and suit you delightfully. Now, dear Rose, please be good, *please* don't be independent! Your cousin tells me what an unmanageable spirit of independence you have; but there is nothing to rouse it now."

"It is a shame of Richard!" said Rosamond. "I have no such spirit, not a bit of it. I have been dependent all my life, — a little adopted orphan, receiving every kind of love and care. I do nothing but accept favors. To prove it, I am going to accept your very kind offer, and wear the dress, and jingle the coins in Richard's face to show him he was in the wrong!"

"That is very nice of you, dear. But I must have given a wrong impression of your cousin's words. He was telling me of the little lodge, and how you insist on living there by yourself."

"But even then I shall not cease to be dependent," said Rosamond. "I shall take away his house, and pay no rent. I shall rob him of his old servant, and eat his vegetables, and preserve his quinces. Such things don't trouble me at all, Nita. I am sure Richard likes to help me, and I don't mind being helped. No; I can say to you what I cannot say to him. Suppose I went back to Thorncliff as he wishes, with a companion, and let him keep up a household for me; what an embarrassment, what a hindrance I should be, if he wished to marry! A cousin in possession! and he, with every generous reluctance to change my plans, and perhaps sacri-

ficing himself in one way or another! It would be most improper, most absurd! Auntie could not possibly have wished it, as he thinks! I simply will not do it!"

Rosamond looked straight before her as she launched her bolt and freed her mind. She was conscious that her words were vehement and her manner agitated, but at least it must carry conviction. She did not wish to see her companion's face, or note the telltale blush that probably showed how well her own meaning had been understood. But somehow, without looking, she was conscious of a keen, smiling glance, and detected a strain of tender amusement in Nita's soft voice as she said, "I do not think, Rose, you need ever dread being turned out. I think your presence at Thorncliff will never be felt as an embarrassment."

This was all that was said. Rosamond was conscious suddenly of the most overpowering agitation; tears would have been a relief. Nita's speech might mean either of two things: she might wish to assure her of her future welcome at Thorncliff under the reign of its loving new mistress; or she might wish to intimate that for her the claims of Deep Dale were supreme, and that were Rosamond settled in the old homestead on the Hudson, she need never fear to be dispossessed by its rightful owners.

There was matter enough to cogitate upon, but all that also must wait.

CHAPTER XVII.

"BROTHERS — AND A SERMON."

TWO days afterward Richard was sitting in his room at the hotel, when a hasty knock was given, and Charley entered, with a face full of perturbation.

"Oh, all right, Dick!" he said. "It's a comfort to find somebody at home! What in the world has become of Rosamond? I went round to the Van Vlecks' to look for her, and the stupid servant insisted that Miss Leigh had left town. What on earth does it mean? I must say, if Rosamond has gone off and left my wife in this way, without a word of explanation, I think she has behaved very shabbily, and in a very extraordinary manner!"

Something in the tone and temper of this speech roused Richard's wrath; but he controlled himself, suddenly remembering his own delinquencies.

"I am the real culprit," he said, fumbling in his pocket and producing a crumpled note. "You must try to make Nelly forgive me. I hurried Rosamond off, and entirely forgot that she left this note for your wife."

"But where on earth has she gone?"

"She has gone to Deep Dale with Miss Heatherington."

"And left my poor Nelly in bed! I would not have believed it of Rose!"

"Is your wife ill?"

"She is better to-day, but bothered to death with those servants Rosamond got for her. She is not strong enough to bear so much worry."

"Is she ill in bed?"

"Not to-day. But she ought not to be left in this way, without a word!"

"I told you the fault was mine," said Richard, coldly.

"But what possessed Rose to go, anyway?" asked Charley, in the same aggrieved tone. "She was very well-off at the Vans, I should think, — a comfort to the old man, and all that; and she promised me to look after Nelly."

"Has she done anything to keep her promise?"

"Anything? She has done everything! She got us all settled again, and has been coming every day, and they have had great fun together over housekeeping and so on. That's what makes it seem so unkind to Nelly. She was getting to depend upon Rose, you know."

"Is it best that she should learn to depend upon her, Charley?"

"Why, look here, Dick," said poor Charley, jumping up and stamping up and down the room in evident misery of mind, "you don't seem to realize

what a little young thing Nelly is, and so delicate ! I can hardly do my work at the office, for worrying about her and my affairs ! ”

“ What affairs ? ”

“ Why, everybody has expenses and bothers, I suppose. I know what mine ought to be, and I thought we could manage ; but between this scandalous rent and the everlasting out-goings of household bills, the in-comings are beginning to look a little ridiculous in comparison. That is another thing I came to see you about. That mortgage of mine on the factory at Mattekill, — don’t you want to take it off my hands, Dick ? ”

“ It pays six per cent. Where will you get more, nowadays ? ”

“ Oh, I know all that. But I need the money. ”

Charley sat down with rather a white face after his confession, and Richard got up instead, and paced up and down in deep and troubled thought. He resolved not to speak hastily. Here was his brother, the youngest of the family, his mother’s darling, such a boy still, saddled with a perfectly helpless little wife, and already, in the first half-year of their marriage, reduced to selling out a part of his little patrimony to keep his head above water. The words of his mother’s letter recurred to his mind, — her charge to Rosamond to remind him if either of his brothers needed help. The need had come, indeed ; but how best to help him ?

Rosamond’s plan about the lodge cottage returned

to his memory, and again he rejected the idea, this time with anger. If nobody else took thought for her, why, it was more than ever his duty to do so. What was Charley thinking about? How blindly he used all the generous help she brought him! How selfishly ready he was to absorb all her time and strength, taking it simply as a matter of duty to that little idiot of an Eleanor!

His ire grew with his reflections. One thing was certain, — Rosamond should not be sacrificed! He would give Charley a piece of his mind on that subject once for all. But even as he opened his lips to speak, the vision of her sweet earnest face and pleading eyes came before him, — eyes so like his mother's in form and expression. "Help Charley! Don't let me stand in the way of one of Aunt's boys!" he seemed to hear the soft voice say.

"Did you speak, Dick?"

"No. Never mind. Let me think a moment."

The moment seemed very long to Charley. Nearly half an hour passed in perfect silence, and then Richard, with a smile like that of an indulgent father, laid his hand on his brother's shoulder.

"Come," he said, "cheer up, old fellow! I begin to see my way clear. Let us go over it all. There can't be much amiss yet. Can you stay for an hour or so?"

"Yes; I've got through for the day, and Nelly is out making calls."

"So! That is well. It will do her good to see

people, and not mope. Charley, have you many bills out?"

"Not many, because I pay for nearly everything as I go. But it takes all the money to do that and pay the rent; and there is a big bill for coal, and something at the stable; I don't see my way to paying either of them. And the doctor! Heaven knows how much he will charge! He keeps on coming nearly every day; and these city fellows ask more than twice as much as country doctors."

"I don't see that there is much to worry about. Do your servants do better? That girl of old Martha I telegraphed about,—cannot she be licked into shape?"

"That is the very thing I wanted Rose for," said Charley, with a grim chuckle. "She will have to tackle that girl! I told her this morning to go down and tell the other one to hurry up breakfast, and she answered, 'Me and her don't speak!'"

"What did you do?"

"Why, of course my first impulse was to turn her out. But Nelly cried, and said Rose was the only one who knew how to manage her. And then when I went for Rose, I found she had quietly given us the slip!"

Richard got up again to walk off his wrath, but it was too late; he could no longer keep silence.

"Charley," he said, "I think you scarcely seem to realize that Rose is our mother's legacy to us,—a most dear and precious legacy, to be cared for and

cherished and protected in every way! Think of her childhood among us, — the only sister we ever knew! Think of her constant devotion to our mother when we all left her! Think how she was faithful unto death, receiving her last words and treasuring them for us! Think how all her fortune went in a moment, and with what a brave, undaunted front she met her loss! And now that she is having this little rest before beginning again a life of work and care, do not let us grudge it to her! Do not let us be hard on her, or expect too much!”

Charley was moved, but his heart was too much engrossed by his own broken-winged butterfly to quite open to any other idea.

“And so you are going to give her the lodge!” he said in an aggrieved tone.

“If she wishes it, she shall have it. Why not?”

“Oh, of course, only I don’t see what she wants a house for; and I often wished you would rent that one to me.”

“With five tiny rooms!” said Richard, in a tone of disdainful wonder.

“We don’t use much more than five rooms in the great house we are living in; and there would be a considerable difference between the rent you would ask, and what my landlord gouges out of me.”

“Now, Charley, all this is absurd. I told Rose so when she spoke of it, and I have not changed my opinion.”

“When she spoke of what?”

"When she asked me to let you have the cottage; offered to give it up! Yes, my dear boy, she would n't stand in your way for a moment, if it depended on her. But the house is far too small for your family. In fact, it is not fit for Rosamond. It is a mere lodge, meant for a servant's use. Still, if she wishes it, she shall have it. And I tell you, as I told her, that if you wish a house at Thorncliff I will build you one; but you can't have Rosamond's!"

Charley started up and wrung his brother's hand.

"Dick," he said, "I did n't mean to be so selfish about poor Rose. But I am bothered to death!"

"I see you are."

"One thing first. Why not let me live at Thorncliff? I don't want to put you to all this expense and trouble."

"That is my lookout," said Richard. "There is a very good site for your house, Charley, on that knoll with the oak-trees, on the western boundary. Don't you remember what a pretty little wood-path leads from there to the homestead? If I put you into Thorncliff, what shall I do myself? I do not believe in co-operative housekeeping, my boy."

"No; but I supposed you didn't mean to go back."

"To go back! It is the one thing in the world I do mean! What else would you have me do?"

"Why," floundered Charley, "Louisa says you will have to live at Deep Dale until Mr. Heatherington dies."

"Louisa!"

"Yes. His daughter told her with her own lips that she had solemnly promised her father that she would never leave him."

Richard stood transfixed, staring at his brother with a flushed face.

"Louisa thinks it may be her duty to live at Thorncliff and keep it up," said Charley, with a grin. "But it would be a trial to her; she does not really wish it."

"That is fortunate, under the circumstances!" said Richard, grimly. "I wonder what all the family mean! They must have taken leave of their senses! I, and I only, intend to live at Thorncliff! Good heavens! you divide up my acres among you as if I were dead!"

"Why, Dick, don't take it in that way! Of course we have no right there any longer —"

"I did not mean that, at all," said Richard, in a changed voice. "It is always home to you and Walter, Charley, and the old door's always open! But to hear of Louisa!"

"She is pretty bad," admitted Charley. "But really, Dick, if Miss Heatherington *has* made a vow!"

"Well, and if she have?"

"Why, what can you do about it?"

"Nothing. I am not engaged to Miss Heatherington."

"Not engaged?"

"Certainly not. I admire her greatly, — perhaps more than any woman I have ever met; but I have never told her so."

"More shame to you, then!" said Charley, bluntly.

"What do you mean?" said Richard, in a voice of concentrated indignation. "There are things you have no right to say, Charley!"

"And there are things you have no right to do! I don't care whether you are angry or not, I *will* speak! I could n't have believed it of you, Dick! Told her so! You have told her nothing else, in looks and manner, for months past! A man of honor is bound not only by words. You have kept all other men away by your constant devotion, your raptures over her singing, your lover-like airs, — always at the house —"

"On business!"

"That is all very fine; but all New York believes that your chief business is with the heiress."

"A fig for all New York! Who cares for gossip?"

"There you are wrong," said Charley. "No man has a right to expose a girl to that kind of gossip, and fill her mind with expectations, if —"

"Hold your tongue!" thundered Richard. "I will not allow such things to be said! Do you take me for a fool or a puppy, that you talk of *expectations*?"

"I have eyes in my head," said Charley, doggedly. "I can see plainly enough what that beautiful girl is thinking about."

"You see a great deal that never existed. Not another word! We are here to talk of your affairs, not mine."

"All right," said Charley. They fronted each other with angry faces and blazing eyes for a moment; then suddenly each softened, and grasped the other's hand. "Forgive me for hurting you, Dick," said Charley.

"Thank you, dear boy! I'll think over what you said," answered his brother in a low voice.

They sat down again, and a few moments passed in silence; then Richard spoke cheerfully.

"And now, how about the new house?" he said.

"Can I afford it, is the question," said Charley.

"There are a great many questions. Would Nelly be happy in such a lonely spot, with you off all day?"

"She would have Rosamond."

"Yes; Rose would be very near, if that plan is carried out."

"You may well say *if*," laughed Charley, "with that fellow Windom hanging about."

"Confound him!"

"I can't make you out! It seems to me the best match in the world,—giving her everything she needs. Don't be such a dog in the manger, Dick!"

"I fail to see the sense of that remark. However, let us get on with this matter. We cannot begin too soon, if you are sure Nelly would like it.

The frost is nearly out of the ground, you know. We will draw a rough plan of the house, to suit your ideas, and take it round to Winter to work up."

"But, my dear fellow, the expense!"

"I will see to that, my boy. Let me think; the interest on that mortgage you wanted to sell out would pay your rent, and be an ample return to me for what I put in the house."

"Not really!"

"Building is cheap just now. But you must go over it all carefully, counting in your daily journeys, and the keep of a horse, and a man's wages, — or a boy might do. I wonder if it would swamp you, Charley?"

"Not a bit of it! I understand all such items. What I can't cope with is these everlasting tradesmen, with their charges, and the servant question, and the doctor."

"You will not get rid of the servant question by living in the country, — quite the contrary."

"Oh, Myra will get along all right if Martha is near enough to come down upon her about once a week!" said Charley, carelessly.

"And, Charley, another thing. Bring me those bills that bother you. Remember what mother said! And if she thought it right for me to help you, she must equally have thought it right for you to accept such help."

Charley quite broke down.

"Dick," he said, with a catch in his voice, and

holding out his hand, "I don't believe anybody ever had such a brother!"

"Never mind all that, dear boy! Are you saddled with that house for the whole year?"

"Oh, no, thank goodness! I take it furnished by the month."

Richard started up, greatly relieved.

"Why, that is well!" he said. "If I were you, I would get out of it as quickly as possible, — the sooner the better."

"But I must live somewhere," said Charley; "and I hate hotels!"

"Why, of course. Come and make me a visit at Thorncliff. I shall not be there much myself, just now; but you can make yourselves comfortable. The old servants will take care of Nelly while you are away, and the neighbors are sure to be kind and friendly. And it is everything to be on the spot while your house is building, to look after the workmen."

Charley was radiant. "Thank you, thank you!" he said. "It is a famous piece of kindness. Only," — he suddenly turned grave, — "I don't want to put you to all that expense of building, unless you are *sure* to come back and live in the old place yourself. Why not rent it to me until matters are settled?"

Richard smiled. "My dear fellow, do you know how many thousands it takes to keep up that place, even with so few servants, and all the other reductions? More, by a good deal, than you spend

upon all those expenses you are worrying yourself about."

"I don't suppose I do know," said Charley, wistfully. "But, really, Dick, supposing Rosamond should marry and go off, I think the cottage might be made to do; and it would save you lots of bother."

"No, it would not do at all. I will not have the idea broached. I will not rob Rose of that one spot of refuge! If you had seen her face yesterday, Charley!"

"What do you mean?"

"White as marble, and such a hunted look in the eyes. We have been worrying her to death among us, — and that man always hanging about. She was glad enough to escape, I tell you. She had promised to go later on, but the journey was hurried because of Mr. Heatherington. His gout came on the night I was down there. I left him in Grant's care and went for his daughter, who claimed Rosamond's promise to go with her. She was full of distress about leaving Nelly and her godfather, — morbidly conscientious. I had to assume a tone of real authority to carry her off."

"A dull time for a visit, I should say."

"I think not. Mr. Heatherington is not very ill; I shall come and go; the place, even at this season, is a perfect dream of beauty; there is plenty of church-going of a rather advanced type. Then, Grant is staying there, and is a very pleasant companion."

"Why would n't he do instead of Windom?" asked Charley, laughing.

"I would as soon tie her to the tail of a comet," said Richard, disdainfully. "Well, Charley, talk it all over with Nelly, and let me know what she says. If you both like the plan, I need not say how welcome you are in the old home."

But when Charley, flushed with hope, had taken himself off to impart to his little wife all the details of his brother's kind and helpful scheme, Richard locked the door from further intrusion, and stood in the middle of the room motionless as a statue.

"I will not, I cannot believe it!" he said aloud; then suddenly sat down and covered his face with his hands.

It was all true that Charley had said. He had gone on in his blind fatuity till there was no room for retreat. There was no doubt that his conduct must have appeared to the world that of a lover — To the world? To her father, to herself! And if —

He might call himself fool and puppy, and reproach himself for self-conceit, but still remained that "if."

It was possible; and in that case his duty lay plain before him, and a long, arid road it looked. He knew that nobody more fair, more sweet, could bring gladness into a man's life. No man could dream of a richer prize than that heart of gold, that form of loveliness, that hand filled with the treasures of life, that voice of perfect music!

And yet as he mused he perceived that he stood entirely outside of all these charms, and that any impulse to call them his own was quenched in the thought of the cost of the winning, — the relinquishment of his individual life, the forfeiture of his personal independence, the desertion of the home he loved, sanctified as it was by his mother's memory. The old man with whose crotchets he had often found it hard to deal patiently must be his daily companion, the real authority over home and wife. In his idiotic, conceited search after what was most choice in womanhood, his cold-blooded siftings and comparisons, he had brought upon himself this fate! He had found his "superior" ideal, there was no doubt of that, — "a perfect woman nobly planned;" and he groaned in spirit.

Could it be possible that he had not only found but won her? It would not do to thrust this idea aside as an impulse of vanity; he must look it in the face. It might be so. Unworthy as he felt of such a regard, he saw clearly that in pursuance of his fatal, cursed plan he had left no stone unturned to recommend himself to Miss Heatherington. Had he unwittingly succeeded?

He thought of the daily ride always by her side, of her sweet smile of greeting, her delight in her father's contentment. He thought of that father's trust and confidence in him, choosing him above all other men for the work he had at heart — and, Good heavens! what a bore the old gentleman was getting to be!

And the work — he hated it. Nothing should induce him to go on with it, if — It would only be a fruitful source of vexation and family quarrels, with that fellow Grant always at hand to suggest the most impossible experiments, insist upon the most ruinous plans, twisting the old man around his finger like a silken thread.

Again he started up, stung to the quick at the vision of his future; and again the remembrance of the lovely violet eyes, the delicious voice, came with confusing power. He was filled with strange emotion, — emotion that might easily become very sweet. Might he only carry her off, and place her as the crowning jewel in his own home, he believed that his life would perhaps be still a blessed and happy one, rounded to perfection. But to live in another man's house, and give up his independence! The thought was intolerable.

The only possible conclusion to such meditations was to wait and watch, and do his duty at whatever cost. And if the duty proved to be in the path of such utter and difficult sacrifice, why, he had only himself to blame!

Which was grim comfort!

CHAPTER XVIII.

NITA.

WHAT Richard had told his brother was quite true. Rosamond had obeyed his sudden summons with strange reluctance and a sinking heart. Sleep had fled from her pillow on the night succeeding her drive with Nita, and strange, wild thoughts and unrecognized emotions had crowded into her mind as she lay looking into the darkness and listening to the never-sleeping noise of the great city. How restless and desolate it sounded! A great, unquiet ocean, — “a troubled sea, its waters flinging up mire and dirt.” No rest in the constant toil and whirl and strife; the distant shriek of the locomotives, the foggy whistle of steamboats on the river, the frequent cart, waking the echoes in the stony street; the tramp of belated feet, sometimes staggering feet, trying to keep time to a bacchanalian song, — what a horrible thing night in the city was! How had she ever been able to sleep quietly in the midst of this accumulating weight of unending toil, unresting effort, unblushing sin, which, like wolves ravening for their prey, possessed the place?

How different from the exquisite silence of a country night, — the stars stealing out one by one, each with its eloquent witness to the Eternal Faithfulness; night unto night showing knowledge, the heavens declaring His glory!

She would murmur the words of the psalm, and gain for a moment a soothing vision of the quiet sky, the gleaming river, with hardly a ripple on its bosom, bearing proudly its long white swath of moonlight; and then the instant's lull to nerve and thought would break, and a surging consciousness rush back upon brain and heart, with its heavy, straining burden, engulfing her being like a great paralyzing wave. What was it? Why could she not be calm, look her life in the face, seize the new, troubling influence bravely, and analyze it? Pull off the petals one by one, if it prove a flower, or a weed, until she found at the bottom its little seed-vessel of hope, or perchance a drop of honey; or pluck off its wings, if it proved only a troublesome night insect, and lay the poor thing down dead, and deprived of its sting forever?

“ Oh, Aunt, Aunt!” she whispered. Her longing was to lay her head on that dear breast, and feel once, only once more, that irresponsible, joyous sense of freedom and protecting love which had once blessed her life. Since her aunt was gone, why could she not rest instead in God's care? Why could she not put out her hand as she had done before, sure that He would take it, — yield up her will, sure that He

would direct it? She only knew that she could not. She cried for help, and no help came! She laid before Heaven the heart into whose secrets her own eyes refused to look, but turned away with shuddering apprehension, and the heavens seemed brass above her. God answered not; her heart felt like ice in her bosom.

How long and dry and dusty lay her life before her, — every little flower dead that had shed sweetness on its path; duties, self-elected, rustling like withered leaves under her feet!

Yet she could bear it, she thought. People lived and smiled on through everything. But, no, she could not! How could she live, seeing Richard a banished man, his life set in a wrong key, his better nature inevitably undermined, strangers or worse than strangers in his home, all his hidden forces of generosity and affection dwarfed and perverted by ungenial influences?

And yet, no sun could give more light, no flower more sweetness, than Henrietta would bring to the man she loved. But that one influence must be potent indeed, Rosamond felt, if it could change all the inward instincts as well as the outward facts of life, — an influence as strong and compelling as that Divine power which has spurred men into the wilderness as missionaries, or sustained martyrs in the arena. And in vain her eyes sought for any sign of such miracle in her cousin. Without it he were a lost man, — his happiness doomed.

And for herself? She put away the thought with scorn. What mattered it where and how she spent the span of that disappointing, chilling, warped thing called life? She could go to those who needed her. Her dear old godfather, so patient amid infirmity and pain, and loneliness of heart and mind, tied to a companion with whom was no possibility of sympathy and comprehension, — there was something she could do for him. And after that need ceased, there was always Nelly. She could take that burden on her shoulders, and at least feel she was doing something for Aunty; at least so arrange her life that she might be kept from that one spot on earth which she hoped never to see again, — Thorncliff!

And when Rosamond had said those last words almost aloud in her energy and passion, her head fell back exhausted on her pillow, and a rain of tears and a suffocation of sobs came to overpower her. She could not believe that it was herself, that poor creature lying there, crying as if her heart would break, trying to stifle her anguish, burying her face in the pillow lest Cousin Alice, in the next room, should hear and be disturbed! What was the matter? Was she ill? Was she going to die? She shed a few more tears over her own early grave, and attended in imagination a very pretty, flowery funeral, and again cried at the vision of Richard's sorrowful gravity as chief mourner. Then the latent sense of humor which nothing could quite crush within her came with its stimulating power, to show her the absurdity of her

feelings, and her sobs changed to laughter that only a powerful effort of self-control prevented from being hysterical.

It was no wonder that her cheeks were pale and her eyes troubled when her cousin came the next morning, and with his kindly, masterful authority carried her, hardly knowing whether to be sorry or glad, to meet Henrietta at the train. There he left them. Business kept him some days longer in town, — business, any neglect of which would be certain to increase Mr. Heatherington's nervousness, and with it his gout.

The journey was not very long, and Henrietta, always as closely attended as if she were a princess, had both maid and footman, so there was no need of escort. To Rosamond's relief, no trace of sorrow and anxiety was seen on Nita's face. She welcomed her with the most charming, the most flattering delight; bade good-by to Richard with pretty, blushing reminders of his promise to follow soon, very soon; and they were off.

"Dear Rose, sweet Rose!" said the delicious, vibrant voice, as sweet in speech as in song, "it was so good of you to come! I kept saying to myself last night, 'A girl of my own age! a friend of my own age!' with such a sense of gain and pleasure. I did not feel as if I could bear to leave you behind; it was too great a risk. You might have succumbed to the all-engrossing family, or to your terrible conscientious sense of duty."

"I had plenty of duties, but I fled from them, and stifled the voice of my conscience. Or rather not I, but Richard. He whirled me off, I hardly understand how; but nobody ever says 'no' to Richard!"

"Don't they, indeed! What an admirable advantage!" said Henrietta, with a roguish smile. "I will remember that! But what a pale Rose it is to-day! Country air is what you need, dear. We will bring you back in time for your Egyptian campaign with cheeks that shall need no rouge!"

"But are you not anxious about your father?"

"No, not to-day. Last night, when Mr. Thorne came to tell me, I did feel depressed, for I knew he was suffering. But I knew also that he had the very best care in the world, and if I had been there I should only have been sent to bed by them both. Then almost immediately came a reassuring telegram; and another to-day, see what a long one, — quite a letter, fifty words!" She re-read the message with a soft, musing face.

Rosamond's economical soul was aghast. "Fifty words! What extravagance!"

"Do you think so? But I should have been sorry to spare one of them," said Nita. "Why live in the nineteenth century and reap none of its advantages?"

"But a screed like that! And I thought you lived three miles from the telegraph!"

"Yes; but there are the men and the horses, — why not make use of them?"

It was all so simply lordly and profuse that Rosamond could not help laughing at the contrast between the Heatherington stand-point and her own instincts of petty saving, — so necessary, so inevitable to her, so undreamed of here.

“Nita,” she said, “I wonder if ever in your life you stopped to consider the cost of anything!”

“The cost, or the expense? They are very different,” said Nita, in a low voice.

“The money part, I meant.”

“Do I seem to you so whimsical and extravagant? I do not think I am. Papa regulates all these things. If he wished it, or could not afford them, I am very sure that a simple life would be quite as pleasant, and feel quite as natural. I really care very little about outsides. These things are only custom. One could easily learn to do without them, and not mind it at all.”

“Perhaps so. I am afraid I mind it a little; there is a hampered feeling in the constant reminder and check. Did you ever think, Nita, what you could do if all your money were gone, and you had absolutely to earn your own living?”

The beautiful, earnest eyes looked up wonderingly.

“I don’t know that I ever did,” she said. “And yet, it is a thing that happens to many girls no older than I. Of course, one can find things to *do*. I could give singing-lessons, for instance; but it would not be my choice. Why, Rose, there would be only too much to do, if one were entirely free

and untrammelled, really at perfect liberty to go to work!"

"What kind of work?"

"I was thinking of real work, God's work," said Nita, simply. "For one who has no home, no claims, there must be many places in our church where a living—the needful food and raiment—would be secure, and a most blessed life of usefulness!"

"In a Sisterhood?"

"I love the Sisters; but all women have not a vocation, and without the vows, and the separate life, there are plenty of places open. I could go into a hospital, or a *crèche*, or an industrial school; or, best of all, to the Midnight Mission."

"Best of all?"

"Oh, beyond doubt! Who can help these poor, wretched, deceived creatures but women with hearts to love and hands to aid? Rose, I want to tell you something that happened to me lately, and made me think of this. I was walking a short distance one night with Reginald,—it was only a few weeks ago,—when one of those poor shadowy wretches, her shawl pinned over her head, spoke to me, held out her hand to me. I did not think what she was, until I felt Reginald's start of horror. He pulled me out of her way as if her touch were leprous!"

"I suppose he felt it so."

"Yes, if it were a hardened, wicked woman. But, Rosamond, as he almost dragged me past, what do

you think she said? She said, 'For Christ's sake, lady!' Think of a poor, despairing, fallen woman asking for some pitiful dole out of my superabundance, for our Lord's sake, and I turning my back upon her! I felt as if my heart would break!"

"Oh, Nita, what could you do?"

"I did the only thing then possible. I tore my hand out of Reginald's arm and ran back. She was just slipping in among the crowd, when I reached her and touched her shoulder. I put my purse in her hand. 'Do you know where the Mission Rooms are?' I asked her; and then, oh, Rose, the number went out of my head, and I could not tell her! And a policeman seized her arm, and Rex mine, and a staring crowd seemed instantly to close around us. I heard the man say, 'Come out of this! The likes of you have no business to speak to a lady!' And Rex said, 'For Heaven's sake, Nita, come away! Don't touch her, don't look at her!' But, Rose, I did look at her. Her poor, despairing, hungry eyes,—I should know them anywhere, here, or in the next world. The man snatched the purse from her and gave it back to me. I suppose he thought she had stolen it. I took it, and for one minute struggled out of Reginald's grasp and put it into her hand again. 'Keep it, in Christ's name!' I said; and then we were parted, and I went on, weeping so that I could hardly hear what Rex said, or know whether he were reproaching or comforting me. Both, I dare say."

Rosamond herself was shedding tears. A sense of her own unworthiness, and of the selfish, petty aims of her own life in contrast with the yearnings of this sweet soul, came over her, making her hate herself, and love Nita better than ever.

"Did you ever hear of her again?" she asked.

"Not yet. There was nothing I could do just then, except to send a check to the Mission and to pray for the poor thing. But some day I will try to do more. Rosamond, she was sent to me, I know she was, to show where work and help are needed most! Our Lord's very eyes seemed to meet me as I looked in that terrible, fallen face! I knew I could never again say, 'Lord, *when* saw I Thee hungry, or athirst, or naked, or in prison?'"

"But, dear Nita, what can you do?"

"Nothing yet, perhaps. Papa would not approve, and I am only a young girl. But it will be different after I am married; marriage itself is such a change, you know, — makes one so independent. I should immediately join with the workers, and give them all the help I could without sacrificing home duties."

"You speak as if marriage were very near," said Rosamond, surprised.

"Not near at all. It may be that I shall never marry," said Henrietta.

"And if you do, you will have to get your husband's permission to work," said Rose.

"I do not think he will forbid it," said Nita, simply.

But she could not meet Rosamond's eyes, and her color deepened as she turned away.

Rosamond echoed the words in her heart. Forbid it? no, indeed! Where could such aspirations after usefulness, such yearnings for a dedicated life, find more judicious help, more ardent sympathy, than in her cousin Richard?

The vision of a double career of such blessed value to the world rose before her and comforted the soreness in her heart. On the one side all the aid which lavish kindness and princely means could bring to the need of the outcast and desolate, directed and tempered by sound wisdom, and thorough executive ability on the other. As the train sped on, Rosamond's thoughtful eyes remained fixed upon this picture, and her lips were silent. A beautiful picture it seemed, enlarging in ever-new horizons as the years went by, until honor and blessing should crowd their path and crown their lives! It was not yet ready, perhaps. Some delay, some obstruction, there evidently was; something which pained and troubled the sweet soul beside her. But the struggle between conflicting claims must soon be over now, and happiness would reign. Richard was not one to be deterred by cobwebs of indecision and doubt. His steady hand would soon sweep all that aside, and take firm hold of the helm of their future life.

CHAPTER XIX.

BELINDA ET AL.

THORNCLIFF looked bare and desolate enough to its master, when he went, a day or two in advance of his sudden guests, to prepare for their advent. Never before had he been there quite alone. When he had hastened back after his mother's death, reaching Thorncliff in the sweet spring, all had been ready, and Rosamond, duly matronized by Cousin Alice, had been there to welcome him. His stay had been very brief; anything seemed better than to remain in the rooms where *she* could never come again, and ache

"for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that was still."

He had gone back to England, and, as he now remembered, the first news that followed him was of the loss of Rosamond's fortune. He felt, in looking back, that had he been less impatient of grief, and remained near her, he might in some way have averted or lessened the calamity; but it was too late now to repent of that action.

Yes, he had felt the desolation to be past endurance even then, when soft air blew in at the open

windows, and the garden was beginning to show the first bloom, responding to the gentle hands which tended the flower-beds; when tender, wistful eyes had watched his mournful mood, and every consoling suggestion had been brought to lift his heaviness, — most of all, the mute helpfulness of almost equal sorrow.

Now the house was empty indeed. Through some blunder the telegram he sent had never reached the servants. No carriage met him; and when, chafing at the station-master's delay, he refused to wait for a conveyance, and elected to take the long tramp over the muddy roads to his home, only closed windows and barred doors greeted him. It was not till he had pulled the bell with fatal vigor, that Mammy, roused at last from her afternoon nap, managed to undo the heavy bolts and give him a dazed welcome. Martha and George, she explained, had driven off "cross country" to spend a few days with their kin. There was no fire, except in the kitchen; and though Mammy bustled about, and talked of what she could get for supper, she looked so old and shaky that Richard privately doubted her being of any practical use to Rosamond in the cottage.

However, his foot was on his native heath, and he was no weakling. Kindly bidding his old nurse not to trouble herself, he soon had a blazing fire in the library, and the blinds flung open to the last rays of the sun. Mammy considerably wiped a chair with her apron for his use, and the dogs appeared from

some distant lair, and discovered his arrival with obtrusive and muddy rapture.

This was better; he could manage very well for himself for a night or so, — but how was he to make ready for his brother and sister, with neither cook nor butler?

“Cross country” seemed to be the only address Mammy could give, and evidently it was not quite definite enough for a telegram. However, further questioning elicited that Jake the gardener was supposed to know where “George’s folks” lived, and the only course open seemed to be to despatch Jake at early morn, to find and bring back the truants. As the best of old servants are somewhat of household tyrants, Richard surmised that this hasty recall would prove but an unpropitious beginning to a long visit.

There seemed to be very little to eat in the house, and the key of the wine-cellar was not forthcoming. He smiled in grim amusement at his own perplexities; but all the same there was little enjoyment in his meditations, as he smoked his cigar among the dusty books, and turned in early for a restless, tossing night in the bed where Mammy, with more zeal than discretion, had only too sedulously used her warming-pan.

He could not help contrasting the home aspect now with that which it had worn on his equally unlooked-for arrival the day after the fire. How had Rosamond managed, in those few hours, — tired out, nearly frozen, burned out, as she was, — to fill every

room with comfort, and attend to every detail and every person in it? He recalled vividly the picture, as he came upon her half asleep in the library, — her soft bewildered gladness, the resemblance to his mother, striking for the first time on his blinded, stupid eyes. What a girl she was, — so full of character and energy, so bright of mind, so true of heart! Certainly any man might be proud, might be grateful to God, for such a sister.

It was well she was away, and among congenial scenes and companions. She deserved the rest and pleasure, and she needed both. But all the same it had proved nearly impossible to carry out his hospitable scheme without her. But for very shame, and a recollection of his reproofs to Charley's selfishness, Richard believed he must have sent for her to come to his aid. Only Rosamond's absence had discovered the depths of Nelly's helplessness. She was evidently ill, and seemed unable to come to the simplest decision or make the most inconsiderable effort, by herself. There was every reason for haste, to avoid another month of tenancy and rent; but Nelly could only lie on the sofa and drop an occasional tear of mingled mortification and weakness.

And in their perplexity Richard, and even Charley, did, what a week before they would have scouted as impossible, — they went to Louisa for aid!

And it must be confessed the help had been most ready, most efficient. She gave up all other engagements, and devoted herself for two days to Nelly's

needs. Everything moved forward with what seemed miraculous ease and alacrity. Myra had been subjugated by a glance, and the rebellious cook had crouched before her. The long mislaid inventory had been hunted up, and all damaged articles, mysteriously numerous, had been replaced. Lists had been made, silver sent away, trunks packed, linen stored. Charley had inwardly raged at the beneficent sway, though his outward demeanor had been the essence of stiff politeness and reserved gratitude. But Richard, while disliking as much as ever the helper, had owned with frank admiration how great, how valuable, was the help she brought.

He could almost have felt cordially to her, if he had never heard of her schemes as to Thorncliff. As it was, her cold clear eye irritated him quite unreasonably; and any question she asked as to his summer plans bore but one construction to his mind, and was answered with the most forbidding reserve. The only safe subject between them, as they worked together for Charley and Eleanor, seemed to be the unlucky young pair themselves.

"This plan of yours is really an excellent one," Louisa had said, with superb condescension. "I doubt if I could have thought of anything better, myself! It will never do to have them live in New York, that is evident. To do them justice, they have really tried to economize. They have not given one dinner-party, not even an afternoon tea, which is certainly the cheapest way ever invented of paying off

social debts. And Nelly's clothes are her wedding outfit. As for servants, two raw Irish girls! Dear me! I could have managed better when I was ten years old! But still, as they never will get along here, you are wise to move them before they find themselves in a worse scrape. We all think it is very kind of you, Richard. Thorncliff will do nicely for May and part of June —" Here she paused to think. "Yes — say till the 20th of June. Then, the sooner she goes to Scranton the better."

"To Scranton! Does Nelly intend going there?"

"Naturally. I do not know what she intends, but it is the only thing for her to do. If she is ill, the sooner she is under her mother's care the better. Charley has a vacation, luckily, and can be with her. Did I say the 20th of June? I doubt if he can get away so early as that; and yet if they wait till July, it will make it very late, — quite too late —"

"Do you mean too late for Eleanor's health, or for my convenience?" asked Richard, in a voice of polite repression.

"I mean —" She paused and looked at him, and even Louisa's terrible frankness quailed for the moment. She decided to wait yet a little longer; not to say it now, — to give him a little more time.

"I mean — on all accounts!" she said, and colored a little.

And now, Richard thought, if he could only get his guests installed, and have somebody to cook Nelly's dinner and black Charley's boots, he might

safely leave them to make themselves comfortable for the present. But Louisa was right. She was generally right; it was one of her worst faults. Nelly would be far better under her mother's care as the summer wore on. How about the new house that he had promised to build? Ah, how indeed! Could he be sure of living in his own home, it would be delightful to settle near him this young, bright, companionable brother, full of delight in country life and love for this one spot above all other places on earth; to have the other little home for which Rosamond had begged, nearer still, and to secure in her the constant sympathy and comprehension which he dimly perceived he could never quite hope for from any other human being. But if fate ordained otherwise, how would either his brother or cousin face the fact that the old home was deserted, or given over to strangers? They could not. He felt that in that case no new house need be built, no tiny nest prepared. No familiar faces would ever greet him from their windows, no light stream from their doorways to guide his coming feet.

Anything would be better than this perplexed, unmanly state of indecision. He would bear it no longer. He rose from his unrefreshing couch fully determined to waste no further time. His brother once installed, his own departure for Deep Dale should be immediate; and when there, he would follow whatever clew he found to guide him, to whatever end Heaven might ordain.

Before night his house was peopled once more by its apologetic but evidently aggrieved care-takers; and Richard could only hope that Martha's reserve would melt away in the light of Charley's *bonhomie* and Nelly's pretty gratitude, so that he might leave them with a quiet conscience after his welcome had been duly given.

They came the next day; and the stern criticism of the brother-in-law could not but soften somewhat at the sight of Nelly's transparent complexion and shy, tremulous smile of gratitude. He greeted her with kind, old-fashioned courtesy, installed her in the best rooms, and exhorted Mammy to be always on hand to wait upon her. A man must be hard, indeed, to fail in gentleness to anything so young, so timid, and so exquisitely pretty. She was very tired, and only fit to lie on the sofa; while Charley, enraptured with his home-coming, enchanted to be among the old joyous scenes of his boyhood once more, made the house ring with his laugh and call and whistle, and before an hour had passed, tramped down to inspect the site of the new house, offering to carry Nelly on his shoulder if she would only go too.

After dinner, as they sat around the fire, he described with much gusto the last hours in the city, and Louisa's various sayings; and thanked goodness many times that he was rid both of New York and sisters-in-law. Richard puffed his cigar in silence, feeling that there was every justification

for Charley's aggravation ; but still he experienced a sense of relief and pleasure when Nelly's timid little voice from the sofa said, "After all, Charley, she was *very* kind !"

"She was utterly intolerable," enunciated Charley.

"I know," persisted the gentle, tired voice. "She is — queer, sometimes ; but she don't mean to be disagreeable. I don't believe we could ever have got away without her. And she and Walter are very happy together, I think."

It was pleasant to hear the soft voice recall the real duty of gratitude and family feeling. Richard turned to her with a smile of more cordiality than he had ever been able to bestow upon her before ; but it was stiffened into horror by her next words : "Did you tell Richard that she is coming to-morrow?"

"To-morrow ! Louisa !"

"Yes ; to see how I bore the journey. And she wants the girls should see the place."

"The *girls* ! Great Heavens !"

"Yes, in the morning train," went on Nelly, with unsuspecting serenity. "They will get back in time for dinner ; and Louisa says anything will do for luncheon, you need n't put yourself out."

Richard sat in grim silence. Charley looked at him and chuckled.

"I shall be well out of it," he said. "Why don't you cut, Dick?"

"*Noblesse oblige*, I am afraid. Besides, if Nelly were alone, Louisa is quite capable of remaining

behind to take care of her, or leaving Belinda in charge. I must stay to protect my property. Is Walter coming?"

"No; he has to be in New York."

"And I ought to be in New York," said Richard, ruefully. "I meant to leave in the early train. Well, I must wait till Friday."

"Good Friday?"

"Saturday, then. It can't be helped. Why does Louisa choose Holy Thursday for such an excursion, by the bye?"

"She spoke of that," said Nelly; "but she said coming home was n't like making any other kind of a visit; and that although she conformed to Walter's church, and on the whole preferred it for herself, she could not insist on Lenten observances for her sisters, so long as they remained in the Baptist persuasion."

Nelly's innocent, monotonous little way of explaining Louisa's tenets was too much. Both Richard and Charley exploded with laughter, but the amusement of the elder brother was full of bitterness.

"Very well; I will do my best for the fair Hardshells," he said. "But what whim brings them to the country at this time of the year, I cannot fathom. It is different with you, Eleanor," he added, kindly. "You will stay long enough to see how pretty our spring can be, and what lovely wild flowers grow in the woods. Every day, now, will improve the roads, and there are horses in the stable. You must make

Charley take you to drive in the afternoons, when he comes back. So far, you have only seen Thorncliff buried in snow or swamped in mud; but you will soon find how lovely it really is."

"That's so; and thank you, Dick," said Charley, heartily.

"Richard, you are very kind," said Nelly, with an effort. "I don't believe anybody ever had a better brother than we have."

There was something in this shy, set little speech which made Richard smile; and yet he was pleased, knowing it to be not quite undeserved. How afraid of him the poor little thing was! Her voice quite trembled, and her face was suffused with color. No wonder! If he went on getting more grim and taciturn and bitter, he should grow afraid of himself, soon.

He pulled himself together, and resolved to fight off his moodiness, and play the host as agreeably as he could to those most unwelcome guests, — Louisa and her maiden train.

He went himself to meet them at the station; and surely, four such tall, commanding, gorgeously arrayed figures seldom alighted on a muddy platform! He had brought the most available carriage, for roominess, that his establishment afforded; but it was heavy, old-fashioned, and sadly shabby.

He detected Caroline, who was an ardent horse-woman, critically examining the details; and Louisa graciously accepted an unspoken apology, and as-

sured him that they all understood he did not keep up the place, — this would do very well !

“ I fear you will find much to excuse,” said Richard, trying hard not to be aggravated into stiffness. “ The house has been nearly closed, and the roads are shocking. I am afraid, if I had been consulted, my pride in the old place would have prompted me to delay the pleasure of this visit until there was something to show you better worth your trouble.”

“ And we were afraid,” said Caroline, who under the guise of what she would call archness often managed to say very unpleasant things, “ that if we waited to consult you, the visit would have been delayed indefinitely. We knew better than to confide our plan to you, Mr. Thorne.”

Richard had nothing to say in answer to this remarkable speech, and Louisa silenced her sister with a look of disapproval ; while Belinda, whose present rôle was that of a “ gushing young thing,” fell into raptures over the scenery, and the gaunt wintry trees, “ so sweetly bare and deliciously articulated,” as she remarked. Estelle, the youngest and by far the prettiest of the family, remained silent, and looked bored and discomposed. Evidently the visit was none of her planning ; and as he assisted the critical Caroline and the enraptured Belinda from the carriage, Richard heard Estelle whisper, “ You would n’t *really* come to such a place and *live*, Louisa ? ”

Nelly, feeling herself *pro tem* mistress of the

house, tried to welcome them duly, and give them the reception suitable to guests; but it was of no use. They greeted her warmly, Louisa seeming really interested in her welfare, but put her with summary authority back on the lounge, and insisted that she should not trouble herself in any way. "I will do the honors," cried Louisa, gayly. "Come up to my old room, girls, and take off your things, and there will be time to go all over the house before lunch."

Richard, finding himself not wanted, turned into the inner room, with the newspapers which Louisa had brought, and was conscious that one of the sisters remained with Nelly, and took little interest in the tour of inspection on which the others had entered. It was Estelle. She sat down beside Eleanor, and asked with cordial kindness after her health, her voice very unmodulated in its tones, with the flattened *a* and terrible hardness of the final *r*, which characterizes vast districts, both East and West, of our favored continent. She must have known that Richard was sitting in the next room; but she did not lower her voice, or seem to care how far her words could be heard, or by whom.

"So you are all settled," she said. "I should think you would be moped to death, fairly to death, in such a place! What Louisa is thinking of, I can't imagine! She won't catch me staying up here, if she comes! I wrote to mother to-day that Newport might be endurable; but if this North River plan

was carried out, she might expect me home. I like Chicago enough better than New York, when all's said and done."

Richard heard Nelly's gentle little laugh. "You mean you like somebody in Chicago better than everybody put together in New York," she said.

Evidently the two were far more intimate than he had supposed. He rattled his newspaper loudly, and Nelly's tones sank to a whisper; but Estelle's resonant accents were unchanged.

"I should just think I did!" she answered. "And there's no use in Louisa trying to manage me as she does the rest of them! I rather guess I'm too much like her to be bossed very easily. Why, Nelly, you know how you would have felt! How would *you* have borne it if as soon as you had got to liking Charley Thorne, and were half engaged to him, they had carried you away from Scranton?"

"It was n't in Scranton; I met him in Philadelphia," said the lower voice.

"Well, Philadelphia, then, or New York, or Kamchatka; it's all the same! I guess you would n't have been any better pleased than I was!"

"Ah, but, Estelle," said Nelly, with happy dignity, "it was entirely different in my case. Charley is—is Charley," she added, with a soft little laugh.

"Well, and Jim is Jim!" said the strident voice.

"I mean," said Nelly, "that in my case nobody could possibly find any objection, excepting that we

were so young. There could n't be any two ways of thinking about it, you know."

"I don't know at all," said Estelle, stoutly. "I'm sure you have n't much money between you; and if money were all, I have got plenty. I know Charley is a nice fellow, and a Thorne, and all that. Dear me, I'm sick to death hearing of the Thornes! Because Louisa has married the handsomest man in the country, and one of the best families, and all that, she need n't preach to me! She would n't have done it if she had n't been in love with him, if he had been a king's son! I told her so to her face, and she had n't a word to say."

"Why, of course she would n't, — nobody would," said Eleanor, with wondering accents.

"What is she trying to make me do?" cried Estelle. "She is too bad!"

Here came a sob.

Richard desperately looked at the window. Should he jump out and land in that briery thicket of rose-bushes? It looked an unpleasant experiment; perhaps he could yet stem the tide of confidences. He rattled his newspaper louder than before, and uttered a loud "Ahem!"

Possibly Estelle's perceptions were benumbed by her affliction, for she seemed to hear nothing.

"Nobody can do anything with her," she continued, in the same aggrieved voice. "She just goes smiling on her way, and rides over everything and everybody."

"She was very kind to me," faltered Nelly, with a loyal instinct.

But Estelle answered with a disdainful sniff: "*Kind!* Why, of course she is kind. She always is; that's what makes her so aggravating. She admires to *do* for people; and she can do everything in the world, I really believe! She will buy your wedding clothes one day and lay you out the next, and be just as *kind* as can be all the time!"

Exasperation increased her shrillness. Richard again pondered as to his leap. There was no other way of escape; the room had no outlet but into the library.

Too late.

"Estelle, Estelle, where are you? Come and see this perfectly delicious old clock. Where *is* Mr. Thorne? We want him *so* much!"

"Mr. Thorne" threw open the window; one moment more might have saved him, but he had not been quick enough. She was upon him. He was a prisoner.

"Oh, Mr. Thorne, do come and show us all over this absolutely enchanting, delightful house of yours. I *never* saw such an ideally perfect old home!" Belinda's adjectives were as a running stream, and her determination to carry off the master of the house was compelling in its force. With a rueful vow never again to look before he leapt, he followed obediently at her command, and Estelle, with a shrug of her shoulders, was also swept along, pouting and reluctant.

They found Louisa and Caroline in Rosamond's room, and some low-voiced comments on the heaviness of the old mahogany furniture and the superior effect of a brass bedstead were instantly suppressed. Richard was surprised at the suddenness with which Estelle waked into interest.

"Is this Miss Leigh's room?" she exclaimed. "What a shame! It is n't nearly pretty enough for her! I only wish she were at home to-day. It wouldn't be half a bad place if she lived here!"

"Half a bad place!" shrieked Belinda; and Louisa added, "Rosamond is the greatest favorite with Estelle; she does n't guess what an admirer she has in my little sister."

The little sister, who stood full five feet seven, smiled contemptuously at this speech.

"Miss Leigh neither knows nor cares about my feeling for her, Louisa," she said; "but all the same I think she is the nicest and kindest person I have met out of Chicago!"

From room to room they roamed with unspoken words on their tongues, and eyes full of speculation and arrangement. To Louisa and Caroline, Richard's presence was an unwelcome restraint; but Belinda was one of those women to whom "a man's a man for a' that," and she would by no means give him a chance to escape, but kept him plied with questions and suggestions. Why did he not do this or change that? What a pity the house was not of wood instead of brick. It was so much easier to alter a

wooden house. Now a little loggia here ; positively he ought, he *must* throw out a little loggia. Such a lovely, romantic place to sit on moonlight nights. "Where *do* you sit on moonlight nights, Mr. Thorne?" asked the artless Belinda.

"At this time of the year I sit by the library fire," he replied.

"Oh, you are so dry and droll!" exclaimed the irrepressible one. "Louisa, I am telling Mr. Thorne how sweetly romantic a loggia would be just here,—perhaps a little balcony would have to be thrown out to correspond, in the room below. Yes, I think it would, Mr. Thorne."

Richard bowed. He decided that would be his best answer to Belinda's remarks. He would keep on bowing.

Louisa's steady, practical voice stemmed the flood of nonsense for a moment. "No, Belinda, you are quite wrong. These little excrescences and perches which you see in what are called the Queen Anne houses would not suit at all with these square heavy walls and this solid old-fashioned style. This house has its own charm, its own character, and it would be foolish to try to alter it ; you would only spoil it."

"Ah, yes! such an aroma hangs about an old house!" sighed Belinda, fixing her large, sentimental eyes on Richard ; and he bowed.

In contrast with her sisters, Louisa was really almost endurable. But how had Walter lived through the winter, and preserved not only his health but his

sanity? It was inscrutable! Richard muttered to himself his favorite "Great Heavens!" many times, as with patient, speechless politeness he completed the tour of the rooms, ignoring Louisa's sensible suggestions, turning a deaf ear to Caroline's sarcasms, and bowing gravely to the gushing Belinda. Estelle long before, with unconcealed ennui, had escaped from the group and returned to Nelly in the library.

CHAPTER XX.

DEEP DALE.

SATURDAY afternoon found Richard Thorne driving through the beautiful park of Deep Dale and rapidly approaching the mansion. It stood in a charmingly diversified country, constantly rising higher, but so gradually that a feeling of new surprise always struck him when at a certain bend of the road he caught a glimpse of Long Island Sound, several miles away, and felt in the breath of the south wind a delightful suggestion of ocean freshness. And yet as he drove farther on an opening to the north showed soft distant hills, blue in the spring haze, but near enough to give an idea of shelter and protection, and make the word "Dale" not inappropriate.

Nature had done much for the beauty of the park, and man had refrained from injuring it by over-cultivation or petty ornamentation. The old forest trees stood in noble groups, and a little creek purled along, its banks shaded by willows whose pendent boughs were turning golden green in the spring air. Here and there a rustic bridge led to some winding path beyond; but until the road neared the house there were no evident traces of gardener's work.

The house itself was a delightful one. Its walls were nearly hidden by vines, but they showed here and there an odd admixture of brick, rough stone, and heavy timbers, as if built at different periods and with no settled unity of plan. It seemed to have grown as a forest tree might grow, broadening itself in kindly amplitude of shelter. Whenever new space had been needed, a wing had been built or a gable raised. Wherever a pretty view could be secured, or a flood of sunshine coaxed in, there a picturesque balcony, or a deep bay-window, had been thrown out. Thus it stood, stretching wide its beneficent welcoming arms, and all embowered in a soft green veil, — a human nest of refuge and repose, on every wall of which seemed graven the magic word HOME.

As the carriage stopped, Richard was conscious of a new sensation of nervousness, and he lingered for a moment before entering the beautiful hall, spacious, low, and heavily beamed. An immense stone chimney showed a blazing fire, and glass doors at the southern end revealed a conservatory full of bloom. The broad stairway occupied a shallow wing to the right, and its first flight ended in a landing almost deep and wide enough to be called a room. A line of mullioned windows, giving a lovely view of lawn, trees, and stream, filled the end. Below them ran a long cushioned seat. Here also was a fireplace in which a little fire of wood was softly burning, and various antique chairs were grouped about it.

Richard had always admired this stairway, and was familiar with all its details, even to the stuffed peacock which perched upon the carved balustrade, with its superb tail sweeping downward. But just at this moment he had no attention for anything but the human picture to which it was a frame, and which caught his eye with sudden and startled interest. For on a low chair by the fire sat Rosamond. The sunlight played upon her graceful head, and her eyes were full of laughter, as she reached up for a book that was teasingly held just beyond her reach by Reginald Grant.

It was not the first time that Richard had noticed the look of admiration in the young man's face; but it struck him now afresh, as did the appearance of easy familiarity and *camaraderie* between them.

"Give it to me!" she cried laughingly. "You are not worthy to hold it! I consider you nothing better than an iconoclast, Mr. Grant." And then the fresh breeze of the opening door and the clang of its closing struck their attention, and they looked down to see Richard at the foot of the stairs.

"Why, how are you, old fellow? This is good! We did not expect you till evening," cried Reginald, with outstretched hand. Rosamond smiled her welcome; but Richard fancied there was an instant's hesitation before she held up her soft cheek for the cousinly kiss which was a matter of course on arrivals and departures.

"How did you happen to take the slow train?" she said.

"And how did you get up to the house?" asked Reginald. "We meant to send over for you to the express."

"Thanks. There was a comfortable little trap at the station, and a boy to drive. We made pretty good time. I was bored in New York, and thought I would come on without waiting. After all, I have gained three hours by doing so."

He sat down beside Rosamond and looked at her attentively.

"You are better," he said, noticing with pleasure the brightness of her eyes and the hue of her cheeks. "How is Mr. Heatherington, Grant?"

"Better; greatly better. He hopes to dine with us this evening. Will you sit here, or shall I conduct you to a less draughty place before I leave you? I am obliged to go to the village for half an hour or so."

"We will sit here," said Rosamond. "You will be late for service, Mr. Grant."

"I think not; I walk quickly. I shall make a convert of you yet, Miss Leigh."

She answered with a low, girlish laugh, as he disappeared; and Richard looked searchingly at her.

"A convert to what?" he asked.

"Only his nonsense," said Rosamond. "He has been giving me his views on various poems, and picking to pieces all my old reverences and admirations. He says Lady Burleigh died because she had the soul of a chambermaid; and that when her lover

'whispered gayly' in her ear that he had watched her, and thought she loved him well, the only suitable reply would have been a box on his!"

"He is an amusing fellow. Do you like it here, Rose?"

"Oh, so much! It is charming. Such dear, bright, kind people!" she answered warmly.

"And the place! Is it not lovely?"

"Indeed it is, most lovely. Where have you been, Richard? I looked for you on Wednesday or Thursday."

"And I would gladly have been here. Is Miss Heatherington at home?"

"No, she is at church. I went this morning, and did not quite feel like going again." Here she sunk her voice, and looked warily about her. "It is n't quite my favorite style of church, you know, Richard. I don't believe I should ever feel entirely at home in it, as Nita does. I think you would have been surprised by the services yesterday. They were very impressive, very affecting; but somehow my nature does not respond to so much symbolism. I think I can realize and worship better without these appeals to the imagination."

"It is a difference of temperament," said Richard. "I feel as you do; but I can believe that many things that seem to me superfluous may be helpful to others. Reginald Grant, for instance. Half his family must be Roman Catholics, no doubt. I presume an ordinary, unadorned service would not have

the slightest attraction for him ; he would hardly feel himself in church."

"On the contrary, I don't think he cares much about the matter," said Rosamond. "It is by no means 'apist or papist' with him ; he is much like other young men, I should imagine, in leaving such matters to the women-folk. No, the strong influence comes from the clergyman here. They call him Father Tennant. I don't know whether it is only a mode of speaking, or whether he belongs to an Order."

"I hope you have met him."

"He has been at the house several times, but only to Mr. Heatherington's wing, I believe. Nita is devoted to him, and tells me how saintly and beautiful his life is, and how much good he does."

"At least you have heard him preach?"

"No ; he had some friend here last week who did us that kindness, — a very droning old gentleman !"

"That is a pity. Father Tennant is quite a remarkable preacher."

"So Nita says," answered Rosamond ; "but the service is quite as much as I can stand. I find myself growing daily more and more a bigoted Protestant, and I more and more object to having anybody intone my prayers for me in B flat !"

"You are unaccustomed to it. Still, I do think you are rather illiberal. If you met Mr. Tennant you would find him a very charming companion. You should not dwell on externals too much in forming a judgment."

"But when his externals make him look so exactly like the wooden men in a Noah's ark!" suggested Rose, slyly.

Richard smiled, but answered: "All the same, in coat or in cassock, he is doing God's work; and in a way which, while it does not please you, will be sure to reach and attract a large class of minds who might otherwise stand aloof and remain unsympathetic with the Church and its work in the world. I have seen in the different charitable undertakings of New York, of which I have made some study this winter, such a terrible amount of misery and want and crime that I will never again quarrel with any man whose life is consecrated to good deeds, because he lays either more or less stress on certain doctrines or certain customs than my nature and education incline me to do. There is plenty of work for all. Let the Church be as catholic and elastic as she may, she cannot be more catholic than want, more far-reaching than misery! I can also appreciate what an advantage it may be to a worker to have none of the hindrances which family ties bring. At the same time, I own I have always been a little surprised at Miss Heatherington's taste in such matters, for she seems, in most things, so peculiarly reasonable and poised."

"She is simply angelic," said Rose. "I would not criticise her; I cannot judge. What to me would be a stumbling-block, is to her sweet soul only a stepping-stone. I don't want to be narrow, Richard,

and you are right to find fault with what I said ; but all the same I am thankful that we have Mr. McMasters at home, with his good old-fashioned ways ! ”

“ By the bye, he sent you his love. ”

“ Who ? Mr. McMasters ? How did he get away in Holy Week ? ”

“ It was at Thorncliff. I saw him there yesterday. Perhaps, if you had heard the wheezy organ and little Miss Smith’s thin voice in the hymn, you would have been more tolerant under Father Tennant’s ministrations, Rose. ”

“ Not a bit of it. I should have ousted Miss Smith, and stopped the wheezing. So *that* is what you have been doing ; you have been to Thorncliff ! ”

“ Yes, ” he said. “ There is no telling what scrapes I get into when you desert me, Rosamond. ”

“ I desert you ! I wonder who all but carried me bodily out of New York ! ”

“ You left me to my fate, and it came ! ”

“ What fate ? Now don’t tease, but tell me rationally what you have been doing, and where you have been. ”

“ At Thorncliff ; blacking my own boots and making my own fire. At Thorncliff ; eating a wondrous mess of Mammy’s providing, which she evidently esteems as a great delicacy, and which she calls ‘ bilin the pot ! ’ In future days, my dear, when she produces it for your dinner, I can only repeat young Bailey’s advice, ‘ Don’t eat none of him ! ’ ”

"I don't know what you are talking about! What were you doing at Thorncliff?"

"Installing Mr. and Mrs. Charles Thorne there for a long visit, and receiving in due state Mrs. Walter Thorne, and Miss Belinda, Miss Caroline, and Miss Estelle Hemingway."

"Richard, are you crazy?"

"I thought I should be, before it was all over." He rapidly sketched the changes and chances of the past week, and she listened with round eyes of astonishment. Suddenly they filled with tears.

"Richard," she exclaimed, "there is nobody in the world, I think, so kind and generous and noble in action as you!"

She stretched out her hand impulsively. He took it and held it.

"I counted on your approval, Rose," he said gravely and gratefully. "But, oh, my dear, it was hard work not to send for you to help me! You would have come?"

"Of course I should have come. But I am almost glad you did it yourself, Rick; that it was evidently your own plan, with no aid or suggestion from others, — you, the true head of the family. I like to think of all of them looking up to you. Did you say Louisa helped you? *Louisa?*"

"She helped admirably! She did everything. She was almost tender to little Nelly in her pleasure at being of use. There grew up something like a friendly feeling between them."

"That is well; how glad I am! And you, Richard; did you not grow to like her better?"

"No, my dear, very much the contrary."

"You are case-hardened. Did not Charley?"

"Not a bit of it. He can hardly mention her without gnashing his teeth."

Rosamond laughed. How different her low, happy laugh was from the shrill mirth of the Hemingway sisterhood! How delightfully her soft, clear voice struck upon his ear, after the cackling of Belinda and the unrestrained accents of Estelle! He could not help expressing his sense of the contrast.

"Yes," she said, "they are 'loud' in every way; but, after all, it is only the American voice a little intensified. One thing you should notice, — Louisa does not speak like the others. She has really a great deal of practical sense and discrimination, and whenever she sees a good model she conforms to it. Louisa will not seem half so bad when she has got rid of her sisters, — which means, I suppose, married them off. She will absorb herself in all sorts of undertakings, charitable and artistic. I expect to see her president of half-a-dozen societies for the promotion of one kind or another of 'sweetness and light,' and bringing to each her marvellous genius for ruling and organizing. Oh, Louisa will have a career, you may be sure, and no flimsy one! And, Richard, one discovery I made, — one saving discovery. She is honestly in love with her husband."

"So her youngest sister confided to Nelly in an aggrieved shout. It seemed to be one of the most serious points in her indictment."

"Where were you meanwhile?"

"In that absurd little *cul-de-sac* of a study, rattling my newspaper in vain to drown their voices."

Rosamond laughed again.

"But it is really true," she said, "and it gives me some hope for Louisa."

"By the way, who is Jim?"

"*Jim?*"

"Yes. My paper did not crackle nor my cough reverberate loudly enough to shut out his name. She was confiding to Nelly."

"Who? Estelle?"

"Yes. By the way, she is a warm admirer of yours, and says Thorncliff would be almost endurable if you lived there."

"I am flattered. 'Jim?' I remember now: she asked me to post a letter for her one day; it was to James somebody — Paxton, perhaps, or some such name, in Chicago. You may be sure she will not be long on Louisa's hands, Richard; she is quite too much like her not to know her own mind and follow her own way."

"Joy go with her, so she goes herself. I cannot tell you, Rose, what desecration it seemed to have those overdressed, loud-voiced harpies roaming over my mother's rooms and telling me what changes and improvements I ought to make. Bounce and I

saw them safely off; and I felt almost as much of a mastiff and watch-dog as he, as we gave our parting growl."

Here a door opened in the lower hall, and Henrietta ran up the stairs, with a smiling greeting of surprise and pleasure. "I heard of your unexpected arrival, Mr. Thorne," she said. "It was very good of you to take that slow train and get here early. Papa will be delighted, for he has quite wearied to see you again."

She sat down beside Rose and laid on her lap a bunch of catkins.

"The first message of spring," she said; "and I heard a bluebird."

She looked rather pale and languid, but Richard thought he had never seen her more lovely.

"Did you have plenty of flowers?" asked Rose.

"Oh, an abundance. I left them to Reginald to arrange. Nobody does it so well as he, and I feared papa might need me; but he is taking a nap, it seems. So the first number of the paper is out at last, Mr. Thorne."

"Yes. How do you like it?"

She hesitated. "Pretty well; I think it will improve as you go on."

"I hope so. I am by no means satisfied myself; but in what way would you like to see it changed?"

"I did not mean to criticise," she said; "but there must be an infinity of interest open to a paper which is given to a study of Nature and country

matters, besides the bare facts and dry theories about crops and methods."

"As, for instance?" he asked, gently.

"There is so much poetry in the subjects treated; such a chance to open blind eyes to the unseen world of beauty about them. I always felt that an agricultural paper ought to reach higher and go deeper than any of them, so far, have done."

Richard pondered. He felt that between the father's whims and changes, and the daughter's sentiment and taste for prettiness, his editorial chair would be no cushioned resting-place.

"It was a pet scheme of Reginald's and mine," continued Nita, "when we were quite children. We used to edit a paper called 'Days and Nights,' with profusely illustrated borders and a great deal of poetry. I remember he drew some wonderful plans for drainage, which caught my father's attention, and some really clever models of new cart-springs and skate-fastenings of his own invention. But I believe our principal idea was, to have the paper as different as possible from the favorite periodicals which my father read so diligently, and which rather bored us."

"What part did you take?" asked Rosamond, amused.

"I wrote the words and the music for the song that we always had on the last page," said Nita, smiling. "Oh, it was quite an undertaking, I assure you; the printing was done on Reginald's press, and

my sister did the painting. My dear grandmother, who brought us up, encouraged it as a useful aid to our education."

Richard seemed struck by the idea.

"I wonder your father offered me the post of editor," he said. "Grant would be a far better man for the place, I suspect. He has such versatility of talent, and such unbounded influence over Mr. Heatherington, besides this natural bent, shown even in boyhood. I really wonder how it happened."

Henrietta said nothing; but a wave of crimson crept over her face, and she rose hurriedly.

"All this time nobody has shown you to your room," she said. "You will think us very inhospitable."

"Not at all; I have been sitting in this easiest of chairs, telling Rose all about my expedition to Thorncliff."

"Ah, indeed! You have been in the country too."

"Yes; I went up with my brother Charles and his wife, who are rather tired of New York and have promised me a long visit."

"That will be very pleasant for you," said Nita, simply.

Her polite indifference, and entire ignorance of the family tactics, struck Richard forcibly, in contrast with Rosamond's enthusiastic sympathy and comprehension. He sighed as he rose to follow her. Beautiful, noble woman, worthy of all reverence and

devotion she might be ; but he felt, with a pang, that whatever happened, his past life was a sealed book to her. And she had never known his mother !

"Whatever happened." He caught himself up with scorn, and felt he had deserved the verdict on the Lord of Burleigh.

Mr. Heatherington did not appear in the dining-room, and Richard was sent for after dinner to his private study in the left wing, where, somewhat later, the others joined him. In the ten days of her visit Rosamond had not yet seen her host, and she thought, as she now received his courteous greeting and apologies, that he looked sadly shaken and ill. But he called himself nearly well, and explained that he shut himself in that part of the house because he needed a higher temperature than could be secured in the large drawing-room and library.

In fact, the room, which was small, with high, oak wainscot, a blazing coal fire, and drawn curtains, seemed to Rose stiflingly hot ; and she thought she might easily trace to its depressing influence the languor she had noticed in Henrietta, and the occasional signs of suppressed irritation she had suspected in Reginald. But besides the exhaustion of such an atmosphere, she began to realize that Mr. Heatherington was not always easy to deal with. The venerable, commanding appearance she had often admired was somewhat obscured, and there was a certain testiness of manner, pardonable in an invalid, but still full of suggestion. His illness did not soften

his obstinacy or control his whims, it was evident. In his best estate he was a peremptory though affectionate man, demanding not only untiring devotion but unswerving obedience. These kindly household tyrants become despots indeed, when the kindness is dimmed by the depression and irritation of illness. It is frequently the case that the worst feature of a sick-room is the invalid himself. All the energy left to him ought to be brought to the self-control and consideration which are the only rewards he can offer to those who nurse him, and whose state without this alleviation is as the collapse of the wrung and fainting victims of a vampire.

And yet Mr. Heatherington was a loving father, and cherished towards his ward a most unusual affection, being in fact more influenced by him than by any other human being. And there could be no doubt of the tender devotion felt for him by both daughter and adopted son.

It was evidently a great pleasure to the old gentleman to see Richard again. His illness had prevented his attending to the various works and plans for the sake of which he had revisited his country home. He had a large farm about a mile from the house, where all kinds of investigations and experiments were made. Mr. Heatherington was most enthusiastic in each new undertaking, and singularly sanguine, taking trials for results, and ready to adopt and publish what to his conservative young

editor's mind was only tentative, and likely to be thrown aside as worthless in the future. Richard knew that he often stood in the character of obstructionist, and chafed beneath the conviction that he could never work to advantage under the control of so different a character. He was looking very thoughtful, Rosamond perceived, and at the first pause turned towards the party round the table. Fortunately, what they were talking about caught Mr. Heatherington's attention, and he said, "Deep Dale, my dear? Was Miss Leigh asking about the name?"

"Yes, papa. As she says, very truly, it is so high above the sea, and such a hilly country, that the name seems oddly chosen. But I tell her if she had seen it first from the top of Prospect Oak, she would not have thought so."

"What is Prospect Oak?" asked Rosamond.

"It is the tree which our ancestor climbed. I am not talking Darwinism, but family history, Mr. Thorne. It was in the ante-Revolutionary days when the first Heatherington who ever lived in America came over from England with a view of settling on a large grant of land, which, as he was a younger son, was the principal provision made for him. He fell in love, almost immediately on landing, with pretty Mary Phillipse, a ward of the old Patroon, and married her. We are very proud of our great-great-grandmother; her picture hangs in the dining-room, over the sideboard. Don't you remember,

Rose, a blooming little woman, in a sort of Spanish hat and long white feather?

“As soon as the wedding feastings were over, the young couple started for their home in the wilderness. I suppose, papa, this must have seemed as far from Albany then, as Omaha would now. They came down on the river to New York, and then took the old post-road as far as it would serve them, and after that struck off into the half-cleared country, lost their way, and finally had to leave their carriage and accept a seat in a farmer's ox-cart over the rough fields. At last, coming to woods, the cart could go no farther, and a pony was found for the pretty bride, and a boy for guide. They strapped a travelling cloak around the horse by way of saddle, and she put her little foot into the armhole for stirrup, and the young husband led her along, through the rough, tangled forest, which proved to be part of their own land, until, after two or three miles, they came to a settler's cabin, where they could rest. I suppose, papa, the man might be called a squatter?”

“He was a very respectable man, my dear,” answered Mr. Heatherington. “His name was Gosse. His descendants still farm my lands, Mr. Thorne, and are excellent tenants. In those days, when the country was all unsettled, a squatter was not necessarily a dishonest person, or an intruder.”

“It was unsettled, indeed,” said Nita. “The first thing my great-great-great-grandfather did in the morning, much to the surprise of his squatter host,

was to climb the highest tree he saw, with the agility of a midshipman, and look out a site for his home. Now, young Philip Heatherington was — was he what you would call a *dude*, Rex?"

"My dear girl! A dude is only the human equivalent for dud, — a thing all outside, empty, useless, valueless. There was plenty of stuff in that young fellow. Those curled court darlings often made plucky pioneers as well as brave soldiers. You may call him a howling swell, if you choose."

"I object to slang," said Mr. Heatherington, testily.

"I will call him an exquisite," said Henrietta. "That is n't very bad slang, papa; and you remember the tradition is that the bride packed her clothes in four chests, and the bridegroom his in six, so he deserves some such name. The oak which he climbed is still standing, and Reginald has made a sort of rough winding stairway around its trunk, so that even I have been to the topmost eyrie where our ancestor stood, and where he selected the spot for his house. He noted the slope towards the south giving a view of the Sound; and the hills towards the north cutting off the wintry blasts; and all the little round-backed hillocks lying about, each contributing its share of shelter to this central nest. He called it Deep Dale then and there, and made his way to it as quickly as he could; himself cutting down the first trees for the bridal log-cabin."

"Was it on this very site?" asked Richard.

"Why, Mr. Thorne, the cabin is still here! It has never been torn down, only built over and obliterated. Nobody knows just where it is, for the Heatheringtons have always been given to changes and additions, and each owner in his turn has added rooms and wings and stories and piazzas. But somewhere behind the plastered partitions are the identical old logs which the young bridegroom cut down. I cannot tell you how often we have searched for them. It seems to me, Rex, that we spent half our time, as children, sounding the walls with little wooden hammers, and sticking long black-headed pins into the plaster."

"This house does not look like one which has been often pulled to pieces and altered," said Richard. "The ivy is thick and close enough to be the growth of fifty years."

"Nearly that," said Mr. Heatherington. "My father made over the building very comfortably in his day; and although there are many improvements I could plan, they are not essential enough to induce me to disturb the vines. In fact, the outside of the house has no beauty. There is an extraordinary mixture of materials in its walls. My ancestors seemed to build with whatever came first to hand. Now, in the farm, Mr. Thorne, I have done better; I dare say you have noticed the long stone barn on the western side —"

Here he turned to the fire again and claimed Richard's attention, while Henrietta said in a lower tone,

"Yes, I can't think what would have become of us without the protecting arms of the ivy to shelter us ! Its beauty has been the salvation of the house outside. You never saw two such restless spirits as papa and Reginald. There are no vines, alas ! on the kitchen wing behind, and at least three times has that been altered within my recollection ; while as for the inside, dear grandmamma used to be in despair over the chaotic improvements. When she finally insisted that it was perfect at last, and that no further changes should be made, the two conspirators turned their attention to the beck. You never knew such a long-suffering little stream, Rose ! It has had a new bed made for it three or four times ! It used to run at the foot of the lawn ; now, as you see, it has been coaxed and trained to do everything a little creek may. If an island were the whim, presto ! an island was made, — though by no means in a single night ; it meant months of rough work on the lawn, and general ugliness. If a pretty view could be improved by its addition, it was straightway coaxed up to the spot ; as, for instance, where you see it from the staircase window, it is fully a quarter of a mile from its original bed. But it is the most good-natured little stream ! It lets itself be led along like an obedient spaniel to the place where it is desired, makes its pretty little bend by way of courtesy, and then runs back to its old life of industry and its serious duty of turning a mill about a mile below."

"That is what has been puzzling me," cried Rosa-

mond. "It always seemed as if no common brook could find so many places where it might lend itself to the picturesque! How cleverly you did it, Mr. Grant."

"And yet you do not like it."

"I did not say so; but you are right, perhaps. I have always been used to a river of such compelling force, shaping the destinies of the whole country and disdaining human interference, that I cannot accustom myself to the idea of training and educating one's water-privileges."

"It is very commonly done," said Reginald; "but you are right as to the sentiment of the thing. In August, when the beck is in a dry humor, we often wish we had left it alone."

"Did it not run dry before it was altered?"

"Not so completely. The old bed was on somewhat lower ground; also, I suppose the more you stretch a thread the more you attenuate it. Still, except for a few weeks in the hottest weather, we have the pleasant purling sound close by our windows, and the sunlight glinting back from the jolly little current. A month from now you can trace the old course of the stream by its wreath of wild flowers. We call it the Necklace."

"What a lovely old home it is!"

"Yes," he said; "I know of nothing like it." But he gave an impatient sigh, and Henrietta, hearing it, looked at him with an anxious face.

"Rex," she said, "I am sure it is not necessary

for you to sleep in the wing to-night. You look perfectly worn out."

"Not at all. It is n't that —"

"I know," she said. "Still, you ought to rest. Victor will call us if anything goes amiss. And the sunrise service is so early, it would disturb papa to have you go, — and surely you *will* go?"

"Yes," he said, "if you do."

"I shall go, and then stay with papa the rest of the morning. How will it be with you, Rosamond?"

"Is Richard going?"

"I have not spoken to him," said Henrietta, a little surprised.

"He will go to the second service, of course," said Reginald. "It is n't everybody who prefers to rise at dawn and walk a mile over the fields."

Henrietta said nothing; she looked grave.

"I will wait and go with my cousin," said Rosamond. "Not that I mind the early walk, dear Nita."

"It is a lovely walk in the fresh, new morning," said Nita. "And, after all, not so long, Rex, as from Jerusalem to the sepulchre."

"Rather a different climate," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

Nita turned away quickly; but Rosamond perceived tears in her eyes, and she felt indignant. She rose to say good-night to Mr. Heatherington, and as she left the room she saw Henrietta flitting, with rapid, noiseless steps, up the stairway. Rosamond's chamber, as well as that of Nita, opened

upon a pretty sitting-room which was common to both. The door of this was shut, and Rosamond fancied she heard the sound of a drawn bolt as she entered her own room. She did not try the handle; but although there seemed nothing that she could do to comfort her friend, her heart ached with sympathy. In a few moments another step came along the hall, a knock at the door of the next room, and she heard Reginald Grant's voice saying very low, "Just one minute, Nita."

After a moment's pause the door was unlocked; a low conversation ensued; then the steps receded, and she heard him say from the stairs, "I will tell your father you are coming in a few minutes."

Half an hour later the bolt was very quietly withdrawn, and Nita entered with a sweet radiance in her face, and apologetic words.

"I just wanted a good-night kiss, Rose," she said, "and here you are in bed!"

"You do not disturb me in the least," said Rosamond. "I am not sleepy. Dear Nita, sit down beside me on the bed."

"Is that what girl friends do?" asked Nita, smiling and obeying.

"Yes; that is what girl friends do. They put their heads on the next pillow, and get into a comfortable position, and then they tell all their secrets."

"And I will tell you all mine some day," said Nita, "but not now."

"When they cease to be secrets, I suppose," suggested Rosamond, smiling. "Never mind, dear. If you are only happy, my curiosity will keep."

"I am not very happy," said Nita, simply; "but perhaps some day I shall be, when my clouds are cleared away. And I promise that you shall hear my secret first-hand, if you hear it at all, dear Rose."

Rosamond said nothing, but gently stroked her friend's cheek, and kissed her tenderly.

"That is what girls do, perhaps," said Nita. "I find it very comforting, Rose."

"Do you wish me to go with you to the early church, Nita? It would make no difference to me."

"Oh, no; it will be far better for you to go with Mr. Thorne. He would be quite alone else, I am afraid."

"Then Mr. Grant will go with you?"

"Certainly. He would not miss it for anything. It was foolish of me to be teased by what he said. He meant nothing; but you see these things are so very important to my mind. Perhaps it is unreasonable for me to suppose they can be equally so to a young man."

"These things?"

"Such as daily services — early communions," explained Henrietta. "Reginald goes, of course; but it is because otherwise I must go alone. Now, I would rather he should go because — how shall I explain it? — because Mary Magdalen did."

Rose could not help smiling. The tone was so absolutely earnest and simple, and the beautiful face on the pillow beside her was so utterly unconscious of its own power and influence.

"My darling, I wonder if it is often in man's mind to look at things quite from a woman's point of view," she said. "I know a number of men who are, I believe, good, pure, high-minded, doing their duty to those around them heartily and thoroughly, as in God's sight; and yet they sincerely believe that a good many things that you think most important are only matters of individual taste, and they feel quite indulgent to their women-folk in allowing them their own way."

"But things must be either wrong or right," said Henrietta, with slight impatience.

"Yes; but there must be as many shades in the right actions as in the separate characters. And then, different kinds of education mould people's ways of thinking."

"I know," said Henrietta. "My father, for instance, would naturally think of such things as people thought fifty years ago, when he was young. But Reginald was brought up, as I was, by Father Tennant."

"Do not be unhappy about him," said Rosamond. "Men are not women, and you can't make them so. If they have the essentials of faith and righteousness, we may safely let them go their own way, and be thankful."

“And, after all, I have not been candid,” said Nita, sitting up. “It was not these things, or these alone, that made me feel badly this evening. It was — everything!”

“I know. Are you going? Good-night, dear Nita.”

“*Everything*, indeed,” thought Rose, as the room was left to silence and darkness. “Dear child! How reproached I felt when she spoke of going early to her Lord, like the Marys! And I was only planning how I might have one last Easter with Richard. I wonder I dare to preach to her, when she is so much better than I. And, after all, how can I tell that she is not right and I wrong?”

She sighed deeply as she composed herself to sleep, and put away from her questions which puzzle far older minds and wiser hearts, and remain still unanswered.

CHAPTER XXI.

ROMULUS AND REMUS.

AN innocent and unselfish spirit is its own great reward. . Suffering does not embitter it, loss does not harden.

Once, and only once, had Rosamond dared to look into the recesses of her heart. Not of her own will had she done so. It had risen up in spectral might to confront her in the night watches ; to show her the true meaning of her secret impulses and wishes ; to hold her up to her own sight, all blind, misguided, self-deceived.

She had recoiled from the knowledge, but it had forced itself upon her in all its folly and hopelessness. *This*, then, was why she could not respond to other love ; could not face the thought of leaving what had been home ; could not uproot her life, and turn to other hopes and efforts. It was *this* !

Her self-scorn had withered her ; her clear sight had depressed her almost to faintness. When she rose from her bed of discomfort, after that self-revelation, she had looked and felt as if she had been through an illness ; and had looked Death in the face rather than his great rival, Love.

Then had followed the swift change to the peace and quiet of the country, the soothing influences of tenderness and cherishing affection, of beauty in the world about her, and the help of the blessed Church. The quiet charm had worked. Rosamond's nature was healthy and strong. She would not brood over the one morbid spot; she put it aside with hearty prayer and resolution. In the daily intimacy of home life she perceived more and more fully the worth and sweetness of Henrietta. Certainly the object of Richard's devotion was everything that his heart could desire or that his mother could have wished for her best-loved son. Strength was given to Rosamond to rejoice in this. There was none of the sting which a foolish or unworthy choice might have planted. To the end of her days, in spite of tolerance and gentle judgment and hope for better things, she knew she must inly sorrow over Walter and Charley; but in Richard's case, once let her put aside her own selfish cravings, and she could glory in his happiness. The present might be hard, for she felt that events were shaping themselves rapidly, and the turning-point must be very near. And if her hand could aid in pushing aside obstructions or opening opportunities, her spirit should not quail.

Strength came back to her body and light to her eyes. She held her soul in quiet, and "cast her burden upon the Lord." When she looked out upon the fresh beauty of the Easter morning, she was

conscious that though her joy might be doubled by Richard's companionship at the Holy Feast, the strength given to her spirit would not be from any human presence, but was the gift and blessing of the Resurrection Day.

She saw Henrietta returning from the church, and went to meet her. Mr. Grant was by her side, his face calm with the peace of the hour; and Nita was so beautiful in her gentle happiness, as she went before them into the house, that Rose could not help repeating the lines from Evangeline, —

“Homeward serenely she went, with God's benediction upon her.

When she had passed, it seemed like the ceasing of exquisite music.”

She was, however, unprepared to have Reginald seize and press her hand, as the words escaped her lips. “You understand, you appreciate her!” he cried. “Oh, be her friend, Miss Leigh; for never did she need one as she does now!”

If his words and manner surprised her, even more so did the gloom and displeasure of Richard's face as she turned and found him behind her. There was an awkward moment of silence as the three looked at each other, and then the breakfast-bell broke the spell, and they hurried into the house.

It was a day of flowers. Flowers filled the house, flowers dressed the church, flowers covered the graves. They were heaped everywhere in fragrant profusion. Nita wore them in her hair and on her bosom, and

fastened a delicious bunch of violets at Rosamond's throat. There seemed a strange peace brooding over the hours as they slipped along, till vesper time; and as the whole party walked homeward in the sunset light, Rosamond was full of the beauty of the service.

"In all my life," she said, "I never heard such music! Can it be Father Tennant who sings like that, or one of those people near the door? I heard nothing to compare with it in the morning service. Nita, your voice is always delightful; but it never sounded as it did this evening, with that other one blending so wonderfully, filling, completing it, till it seemed more like heaven than earth! Why do you all smile? It was like the angels on the hills of Judæa."

There was a moment's pause; then Mr. Grant, with a little flush and smile, lifted his hat, and Nita exclaimed, "Is it possible you have never heard Reginald sing before?"

Rosamond was astonished.

"You!" she said. "*You*, Mr. Grant! Why do you not sing constantly? I had almost said, why do you do anything else?"

"I have given up singing for the present," he answered quietly. "Only on Easter day, Nita, I could not resist —"

"No," she replied; "not on Easter day, Rex."

Rosamond looked from one to the other, wondering; but Richard said, "I can well believe that even

to what you call your Northern constitution, Grant, to hurry home in March from Louisiana to New England was a great imprudence, and might peril a great deal besides your voice."

"Yes," he answered. "It was a foolish impulse, and met with its just penalty."

It all sounded very commonplace; but there was something either in his face or manner which puzzled Rosamond. Certainly there was no suspicion of weakness in that glorious voice, or of want of health in his peculiarly elastic, graceful figure and glowing face. He steadily refused to sing again in the evening, and went to sit by Mr. Heatherington in his distant corner of the room, after he had arranged Henrietta's music for her. Richard, attracted as usual by the beautiful music, moved very quietly nearer, until he was close beside her. When the last soft note died away, Nita looked shyly around. He was bending over her, his face transfigured, his eyes aglow with admiration, his lips almost tremulous with passionate emotion. Rosamond saw her start, and a deep flush crept over her brow and cheeks. She turned back, and with agitated hand fluttered the leaves of her book, but could not command her voice to sing again. Richard was looking at her, eagerly, searchingly, but she could not meet his gaze. No words were spoken, but it was a moment of revelation; the veil was torn away, and heart might speak to heart.

Rosamond turned her eyes from them with one

quickly suppressed sigh. She saw Mr. Grant gravely watching the scene. She met his eyes; surely she caught one ray of pity before he smiled, — a smile, as she fancied, full of bitterness.

To-morrow was the last day of their stay. And as all anxiety seemed now removed about her father's health, Nita was kindly eager that the time should be spent in securing all possible pleasure for her guests. Before they separated for the night they had formed a plan for a morning ride to a far-away spot where the union of hills and distant sea made a beautiful view. So far, they had not ridden at all. Both girls had brought their habits, and had hoped for many a canter together; but Mr. Heatherington had been so complete an absorbent that the chance had never come.

But to-morrow promised to be fine, and it was fortunately the morning on which the farmer, descendant of the squatter host of log-cabin days, was to bring his accounts and receive instructions. Neither she nor Reginald would be needed at home, Henrietta believed; and although their favorite horses were in New York, they could all be mounted, she was sure, among those left behind. Her own pretty mare was safe if she were the rider, though no one less skilful, or with an unfamiliar voice, had better try; and there were horses that would answer for the two gentlemen. As for Rosamond, Mr. Heatherington's sorrel, although nearly twenty years old, was still full of gentle ambition, and admirably

trained under the saddle. Yes, Rosamond must ride Leopold.

They settled it thus at the foot of the stairs, over the bedroom candles. Rosamond was certain that Nita avoided Richard's eye as she bade him good-night, and again the color slowly mounted to her face, and again flickered on Reginald's lips the shadow of a mocking smile.

Very soon after breakfast the ladies ran up to put on their habits; but when Rosamond came from her room she saw Nita, ready, but evidently perplexed and troubled.

"Such an extraordinary thing has happened, Rose!" she said. "I just ran down to papa's room to see him and tell him where we were going, and I found him gone. He has ridden off himself with Gosse to the farm; and, what is worse, he has ridden on Leopold, the very horse you were to use!"

"Never mind me," cried Rose. "Are you anxious about your father, Nita?"

"No, not exactly, for the air will do him good. He always recovers in this sudden way. It is imprudent, but we cannot help it, for he left word with Victor, his servant, that we were not to follow. It is the horse that I am troubled about! I never thought to speak about it to papa last night, and he had no notion we wanted him."

"Do not mind," said Rosamond. "I will stay at home. I have letters to write; you must go without me."

"But we were going on your account, my dear. I have set my heart upon your having one ride at least, and seeing how pretty Deep Dale looks from Merton Hill. It is most provoking! I wonder if Romulus would be safe?"

"I don't know which he is," said Rose, who in frequent visits to the stable with Nita had become acquainted with many of its inmates.

"He is one of Reginald's horses," said Nita. "He is considered broken, but I have never tried him yet."

Then, as steps were heard in the hall below, she leaned over the balustrade, and called in the softest, sweetest voice, "Rex, Rex!"

"Did you call me, Nita *mia*?" he answered, springing up the steps; then, at the sight of Rosamond, stopped with an instant's embarrassment.

"I want your advice, Rex," said Nita, with a smile. "Only think, papa has escaped from us and gone to the farm, and, what is worse, gone on Leopold's back!"

"Don't worry; it will do him good."

"Yes; but what can Rose ride? I would gladly put her on my little mare; but you know Gypsy is not safe with a stranger."

"Decidedly not. I cannot feel happy to see even you riding the treacherous little creature, and she would give anybody else trouble enough. There is Romulus; I need not say he is quite at Miss Leigh's service. He is a little too fresh, but thoroughly

broken. I really think she might use him, if she will accept of my escort and let me ride close beside her on his mate. When Romulus and Remus are together they jog along very quietly, you know, and show no sign of wolfish rearing."

"Or any other kind of rearing, I hope," said Rosamond, smiling. "You must judge for me. You know I am not such a horsewoman as Nita."

"No," he answered; "very few women are. But you are fearless, and therefore safe. With me beside you, I do not think you need hesitate."

A shadow rested on Henrietta's lovely face, for which Rosamond could not account. It seemed a cloud of mingled anxiety and disappointment. Perhaps, after all, she was troubled about her father.

Romulus and Remus were as inseparable as the traditional twins; but although gentle, they were very spirited. It seemed wise to avoid contact with other horses, and Reginald advised that the others should ride on some distance in front.

Rosamond enjoyed the beauty of the day and the delight of her favorite exercise. Her eyes glowed and her lips smiled. She was by nature fearless, so that the dancing of her pretty steed did not trouble her, and she hardly gave heed enough to her companion's warnings.

"Hold his mouth easy, Miss Leigh; he won't stand the curb. You are the first lady he has ever carried. I broke him for Nita, but she has not yet

tried him. I don't like the way he tosses his head and prances. Romulus, my boy, I shall take all that out of you before I give you over to your mistress."

"I should think she was equally capable."

"And she would think so too, perhaps; but it is not true. The mere facts of side-saddle and riding-habit are enormous disadvantages to a lady. To ride well, in spite of such dangerous drawbacks, shows a triumph of will and of skill; but will and skill do not always prevail. Now you, Miss Leigh, ride well. You are fearless, and your seat is firm and elastic; but I am so afraid that something will happen, that I cannot take my eyes off you! I beg you will let the curb lie loose on his neck; and please give me your whip!"

"Really, that would be too abject!" laughed Rosamond. "But I will promise to be very good. Beautiful Deep Dale! I am so glad to have seen it."

"You have not really seen it," he said. "You can form no conception of its loveliness in summer."

"Have you any neighbors?"

"The usual village set, — nice people that we are very fond of ourselves, but perhaps they would not attract a stranger, — and a few country places a good way off. No close settlement as in your North River towns. In fact, my guardian owns so much of the land about here that nobody can build very near us."

"Is it ever lonely?"

"It is often sad, since the changes which have come to the house," he said. "You knew our

beautiful Una, Miss Leigh; but I do not believe you remember the dear, delightful grandmother, who brought us all up."

"No, I do not think I ever saw her. How long has this been your home, Mr. Grant?"

"Ever since I was nine years old. When my mother died, my father sent me here. Mr. Heatherington and he were like dear brothers. People think I look like a Southerner, and must be like my mother, who was a Creole. But I never could have lived at the South; my constitution needs the brace of the Northern climate."

"You go to the South only in winter?"

"I went there this winter; but I do not often go. Of course, I have property to look after, and so on. I do it through agents, for the most part. But this winter I suddenly resolved to go myself."

"Did you not come back very early?"

"Yes, foolishly so. I thought I saw at last an opening to establish myself in a business for which I had a taste; but I might better have stayed at the South."

"Did you find it not to your taste?" asked Rosamond, wondering at these half confidences.

"I found another man had been chosen to fill the place."

"Oh, what a pity!"

"I suppose it is all right," he said carelessly. "Probably he will do the work better, — he won't, though," he added in a lower tone.

Evidently the matter vexed him, whatever it might be. Rosamond felt the subject had better be treated more generally, and said, "I have often wondered what profession I should have chosen had I been a man. I think I should have been a doctor."

"Certainly; there is nothing to compare with it."

"Would it be your choice, then?" she asked, surprised. "I thought you were a farmer."

He smiled sadly.

"I am nothing," he said. "You see beside you, Miss Leigh, a man without a career; blamed for inaction, and thwarted in every attempt; compelled to spend the strength of youth in petty pursuits, and then having the prize of life withheld because of those pursuits. It is not too pleasant!"

His tone was very bitter and very desponding. Rosamond hardly knew what to say.

"And you would have liked to be a physician!" she exclaimed.

"I inherit the taste from my father. He was a doctor, as I told you, and died of yellow fever and overwork in New Orleans. Oh, I understand what the real objection is! Mr. Heatherington fancies that if I were qualified, I should follow in my father's steps, — leave everything, and go down there when the same scourge came, to work and die as he did!"

"Is he wrong?"

"How can I say? It is a noble work, and a noble death! At all events, it is what I was born for."

I know that the strong, the unusual affection that my guardian feels for me is the reason why he has refused his sanction to my wishes. It is none the less tyranny, and galling to bear."

Rosamond could only sympathize in unspoken indignation, and marvel silently why, at his age, he yielded to such interference. She must say no word in blame of her host; but it was hard treatment, she thought, — quite unjustifiable.

"Mr. Heatherington in theory despises, as I do, an idle man," said Reginald. "In practice, he has made any settled occupation impossible. I may break horses, and change the bed of brooks, and build and pull down, and devote all the best years of my life to studies that lead to nothing, — music, painting, any recreation, rather than work. He interferes with nothing but the two things I most value and most long for."

Again she wondered why he submitted to this arbitrary authority, — a submission greatly at variance with his character; but she only said, "You must hope for better things, Mr. Grant. You are very young, and you seem to me to have a most remarkable influence over Mr. Heatherington. You will win his consent to your wishes in time; never fear!"

"You are what Nita calls you, — the soul of sympathy!" said Reginald, gratefully. "I always told you that there was a bond between us, you know, — both orphaned early and living in adopted homes."

"But there the resemblance ceases," said Rosamond, with a very shadow of a smile. "You have your home still, with no work: I have my work, but no home."

"I will not think so," he answered warmly. "My work must, shall come to me, as you predict; and I know no woman living, who is more sure of a 'safe, sweet place beside the household fire' than you may be!"

His words, with their picture of impossible happiness, raised a sudden storm of agitation in Rosamond's breast. Far before them rode that other pair through the sweet sunshine, in deep, earnest conversation. Beside her was this young man with his keen, questioning eyes and strange smile. With an impulse to escape from those eyes and from her own thoughts, she said, suddenly and gayly, "How we jog on! Let us have a gallop, Mr. Grant;" and raising her whip, she struck Romulus a most unnecessary, a most thoughtless blow.

She heard Reginald cry, "For Heaven's sake, Miss Leigh!" and knew that he made a clutch at her bridle; but it was too late. Like arrow from the bow her horse shot forward. The wind swept by her with the force of a hurricane; she felt herself whirled past trees, fences, and fields, — past those other two ambling gently along; she heard cries, thundering hoofs behind her; she clung with desperate instinct to her rein, to her saddle, for a few

moments longer; then came a sudden shock, and she knew nothing more.

It was only a few moments, but it might have been days, so utter was her unconsciousness. Then her senses came slowly back, — not to the present, but to the dear past. She felt herself a child again, once more with the aunt for whom her orphaned heart was always craving. A voice was calling her name, — a voice which held within its scope every happy memory of her life. Hands, to whose firm clasp she had always clung for support, were chafing hers. Arms were about her, — arms which seemed her only true home on earth. Richard was holding her, speaking to her, begging her to look at him, to answer him. She could do neither; she could only lie with closed eyes and silent lips and think, “O God, if I am going to die, let me die now!”

His voice was low with anguish.

“Rosamond, my Rose! speak to me!” he entreated. “My own, my love! Oh, Father in heaven, spare me this blow!”

The words crept to her ear through all the stunned trance of her brain, and from her ear to her heart. Nature rallied from the shock which was so nearly death, and power returned to the bruised body and benumbed mind. She opened her eyes, she smiled at him with her white lips, and he kissed them passionately, his tears raining down on her face as he held her to his breast.

"You know me!" he cried. "Oh, my darling, I thank God for His mercy!"

"What is it? Where am I?" asked Rosamond, faintly. "Did I hear Aunty's voice, Richard?"

"Can you move? Try to move, dearest. You have been thrown from your horse. I cannot tell where you are hurt."

She tried to rise, but fell back helplessly.

"It is my side," she said. "Never mind, dear Rick, it will soon be better. I think I have sprained myself. I remember now,—I struck Romulus, and he ran away. How horrid it all was!"

She spoke in feeble gasps, and he looked at her with the deepest anxiety.

"Your side is where the pain is?" he asked. "Not your back?"

"I think not. Where is Henrietta?"

"I don't know—somewhere behind," he answered indifferently.

"Don't look so worried, Rick; I don't think any bones are broken," said Rosamond. She very slowly and carefully stretched out first one foot and then the other, then her hands. "There, you see!" she said. "Ah!"

"Do not move again," he said authoritatively, as he noted her increasing paleness.

"No; but, Richard, I don't see how I am to ride home," she said faintly.

"I should think not! By the bye, your runaway steed must be far ahead by this time." His own

horse, browsing by the roadside, now pricked up his ears and neighed at the sound of hoofs rapidly approaching, as Reginald and Nita came round the bend of the road and reined up suddenly at the sight of the kneeling figure and prostrate form.

All was confusion for a few moments. Plans were made and orders given; but long before Mr. Grant could send the carriage, for which he spurred home at the top of his speed, Rosamond had fainted twice from pain. When she came to herself she found her head transferred to Nita's lap, and Richard's coat under her, while he was bringing water in his hat from a brook at the foot of the hill. She hardly knew how she lived through the interminable drive home; but when at last she found herself in her own bed, with the doctor at hand, and Nita and the housekeeper doing everything that tenderness and skill could accomplish for her comfort, it was found that her injuries, though painful, were not nearly so serious as might have been feared. No bones were broken; and although a severe contusion and a sprain were grave enough to make the physician insist upon absolute rest and quiet, each member of the party felt with deep thankfulness how much worse it might have been.

She lay quiet, and in the deepest peace. Through all the nightmare of waiting, through the long torture of the drive, there had glistened the little golden thread of a memory so sweet that she could not recall it without tears. Anything so tender, so

penetrating as those heart-rending tones and words, whose power had seemed to call her back to life, she had never heard. They were indistinct and misty in her mind, and she did not try to clear the remembrance.

She would not reason, she would not analyze. She only gave herself up to the sensation of peace. Somehow life felt suddenly full of healing and hope. She called the new influence by no name, but turned to it with an instinct kindred to that which calls the crocuses up through the garden mould and unfolds the blossom of the anemone in the woods. Somewhere near her was shining her sun. Somewhere, not very far off, waited her spring.

CHAPTER XXII.

DARKNESS BEFORE DAWN.

IN perfect quiet Rosamond lay all the day and night, and the peace in her heart kept down the fever in her blood, — the symptom which the doctor had most dreaded.

The house was very still. She saw nobody but Henrietta and her maid, except when the housekeeper, who had formerly been Nita's nurse, came with some little dainty dish to tempt her to eat. Mr. Heatherington had been greatly alarmed by the accident, and was again upset; so that the household had its hands full, with the care of two invalids.

Rosamond vaguely remembered, when she waked on Wednesday morning, that it was the day of the great fancy ball. She hoped somebody had written to Cousin Alice why she could not return. She knew that her matter-of-fact relative would strongly disapprove of such an untimely accident, and said to herself, with a laugh, that if she had died, Cousin Alice would scarcely have forgiven her want of consideration in doing so just as the season had recommenced. It would have been quite as easy to die in Lent.

But she had no thought of dying; she was growing better daily. She longed to sit up, to go about the house, to see the people downstairs. Nita was naturally a good deal absorbed in her father, and she looked entirely surprised and bewildered when Rosamond reminded her of the ball. She owned she had not given it one thought, nor did she yet know what costume she was to have worn. Rosamond could not but marvel at a state of mind so different from that of other New York belles, who were popularly reported to have spent the larger part of Lent in harrying their dressmakers or cabling to Worth, to prepare for this great occasion. Certainly some intense preoccupation of mind must be superadded to the angelic unworldliness of Nita's nature, to make such indifference possible even to her.

That there was preoccupation was evident. Nita owned it herself, in a few shy words. "My thoughts were on something entirely different," she said, and then instantly changed the subject. But nothing that she could do for Rosamond's comfort and welfare was omitted. When released from attendance on her father, Nita never delayed coming to her friend. They spoke very little. Miss Heatherington would bring a book, and read aloud in a voice as sweet in reading as in singing; and if the light waned, she would softly sing touching little ballads with such exquisite simplicity and pathos that Rosamond would feel the tears steal down her cheeks as she listened. But when neither singing nor reading, Nita would

sit looking off into the distance with dreamy eyes ; and when her companion spoke, she would come back with a start and blush as from some golden vision to the every-day world about her.

There was a constraint between them, invisible and intangible, but ever present. It clouded the deep happiness which lay at the bottom of Rosamond's heart, and which she sought neither to analyze nor to understand. The mist that hung over her memories of the day of the ride she did not seek to clear. She would say nothing, do nothing, expect nothing, and accept whatever God sent her — But oh ! where was Richard ?

For two days longer she did not find courage to ask ; and when she did so, Henrietta started, with the usual blush and smile of apology, coming back from some dream which had apparently carried her a hundred miles, a hundred years, away.

" Richard ? Mr. Thorne ? Why, you know, dear, he went to New York the day after your fall."

" To New York ?"

" Yes ; on business," said Nita, with a smile dimpling the corners of her mouth. " I hope it was not partly because he fancied he might be in the way, with you in bed and papa ill again. If so, he was wrong, wasn't he ? You and I know that he can never be in the way !"

Again the dimples appeared.

" When is he coming back ? or will he come at all ?" asked Rose, a little faintly.

“ Oh, I believe so. Reginald is in New York to-day, and I quite expect them both to-morrow.”

She looked so happy, so gay! Was it because of Richard's return? Somehow Rosamond did not think so. She had always told herself that could she see her cousin entirely absorbed in an attachment, she could reconcile herself to the loss it must inevitably be to her own life. For a long time she had felt unhappy lest he should marry without this overmastering impulse, and for want of it suffer unconsciously, but none the less truly, an impoverishment of heart and a narrowing of sympathy for which nothing in life could atone. Of late she had ceased to think of this. Her powers of mind and force of character had braced themselves for the uprooting of her own folly, — the compelling her heart to stand aside, stifle its yearnings, and steadily and faithfully do its duty.

Then had come the shock and the fall, and she had waked, as she felt, into heaven. Whatever else was true, she need never feel again that sense of shame for unasked, undesired love. But what of that other attachment, in which the brothers had so entire a faith, — about which so many plans had revolved? She now saw that her own opinion had never agreed with theirs; and she joyfully believed that in neither heart existed any feeling stronger than esteem and friendship.

With hope like this lending strength to her body and bliss to her soul, she gained so fast that the

doctor gave his sanction to her removal to Nita's pretty sitting-room, where she might have her sofa drawn to the window and enjoy the beauty of earth and sky, as well as the tokens of happy occupation in the pleasant apartment, — with books and easel, a harp and piano. It had been Una's room, and her picture, in its fresh youthful beauty, hung over the mantel-piece; portraits of Henrietta's mother and father, and of the dear grandmother who had taken the mother's place, hung also on the walls. On a low table by the couch was a vase of lilies of the valley, whose fragrance filled the air. It was indeed a most enjoyable and home-like room.

Rosamond lay quietly and looked about her. She felt strong, well, expectant. Her eyes were glowing, her cheeks flushed. After a while she heard wheels on the gravel road, voices at the door, steps in the hall. So they had come by the slow train again!

She waited in vain. The twilight grew dim, darkness gathered, the stars began to appear. With a tension of nerve that was absolute pain, she strained her ear to catch any sound of footsteps; but none came. More than two hours had passed since the carriage had stopped, before the door opened, and Nita came in with a softly shaded lamp in her hands, and a face illuminated with the sweetest happiness.

"My poor Rose!" she said. "How badly we have treated you! I thought Tannie had brought you a light long ago, and I only just found out that

you had been left in darkness. We were in papa's room, and there was so much to hear and so much to settle!" She turned her glowing face from the light.

"I heard the carriage stop," said Rosamond.

"Yes. He telegraphed that he would take that train. We sent over to meet it."

"Did Mr. Grant come too?"

Henrietta looked at her in surprise. "We were speaking of him," she said. "Oh! I beg your pardon! Mr. Thorne cannot come till to-morrow, at this same time. At least, I *believe* that is what Reginald said. I will ask him again."

"No letter, no message for me?"

"I did not hear of any. Were you expecting one, Rose?"

"Apparently it was an unreasonable expectation," said Rosamond, in a tone of pique. "Still, my cousin left here immediately after the accident, and has not since heard a word about me. I suppose, however, he understood, before he went, that it was nothing serious!"

Henrietta looked at her with quiet surprise. "How little you know, my dear! I have telegraphed every day to Mr. Thorne, by his special request. I have not written, because he would get word more quickly the other way. But you know my messages are really letters."

"About me?"

"Principally about you," said Nita, and blushed again.

“And have you heard from him?”

“Oh, yes, indeed! He is not diffuse in any way, you know. His messages were short; I think he counts his words, in the orthodox way.” Then, as Rosamond still looked fixedly at her, she said with a slight hesitation, “I did not bring you the telegrams, because there was other business mixed up with the bulletins of your health. However, he will be here himself, I hope, to-morrow, to explain everything.”

A feverish, tossing night followed this day of expectation. Rosamond half feared, when she first opened her eyes, that she would not be able to rise at all; but she kept such fears to herself, and formed her resolution. The doctor had ceased his daily visit, and Tannie the old nurse, promoted, on the removal to the city of so large a part of the domestic staff, to the post of housekeeper, was very busy, and did not appear. Had she done so, her experienced eye might have detected that Rosamond's languor had increased, and her strength was feverishness. There seemed to be an unusual stir in the house. Rose could hear Mr. Heatherington's voice below, some new excitement quickening his deliberate, monotonous tones. She caught snatches of glorious song from time to time as Reginald ran up and down stairs, which he did many times, sometimes whistling like a mocking-bird, sometimes laughing in response to words spoken by somebody below,—a laugh full of the sunshine of youth and joy; a

laugh which somehow made Rose feel gray and old and shivering, as if tears suited her better than laughter.

And in the afternoon, Henrietta, clothed in a charming Easter toilette, and looking supremely bright and lovely, came in to ask her dear Rose's forgiveness for leaving her; Reginald was anxious she should go with him to meet Mr. Thorne and bring him home. And would Rose ring the bell if she wanted anything? Ruth was close at hand. And if dear Rose should feel able to get up and lie in the next room for a while, would she, — there was a dear! — *wouldn't* she be so very kind and obliging as to make herself *very* pretty in a pink dressing-gown, which Ruth would bring her, which had only come from New York this very day, for this very occasion, because somebody who loved her had set her heart on dear Rose looking her best to-night, and not wearing that old fur-trimmed wrapper any longer? And Nita reminded her that she had never made use of the Egyptian costume, after all, and so owed compliance now, to make up to her friend for the disappointment.

To secure Rosamond's consent, the gown was brought in and exhibited; and certainly Rose must have been more than woman, as well as less than friend, if she could have resisted the united influence of Nita's charming flattery and merry coaxing, and the mute eloquence of the beautiful soft pink cashmere with its graceful trimming of spray-like lace

from neck to hem ; with dainty pink slippers, to complete the prettiness of the gift.

"It is sure to fit," said Nita ; "for Ruth privately cut the pattern from one of your own dresses, and stole a slipper from your very closet, that the size of these might be right ! You good, dear Rose, to look so amiable about it ! I have felt like a guilty conspirator ever since the idea flashed from my mind through the wires in the shape of one of my interminable telegrams to the dressmaker !"

What could Rosamond do but kiss and thank her, and enjoy the new finery with a girl's delight ? Henrietta ran down for her drive, and Ruth stayed, well pleased, to help in making Rosamond ready for the evening.

When the party returned, late in the afternoon, Henrietta's surprise was only equalled by her pleasure in finding Rose ensconced on the drawing-room sofa, clad in the pink wrapper, whose becomingness entirely justified the giver's taste, a cluster of pale roses at her throat, her hair beautifully arranged, her eyes and cheeks aglow with excitement. An older person might have detected a peculiar fragility, and suspected hidden mischief ; but Nita was inexperienced, and only saw that never had Rosamond looked sweeter and more charming.

With an exclamation of delight she turned back to her companions. "Come and see my Rose, my fresh Rose !" she said ; and Reginald Grant entered.

He had not seen Rosamond since the accident, and came forward with cordial pleasure.

"Ah, this is unhopèd-for good luck!" he said. "Miss Leigh, will you ever pardon me for what I did, — mounting you upon that dangerous horse? I cannot forgive myself!"

"And will you ever pardon me," said Rose, "for spoiling your beautiful Romulus, — turning him from a lamb to a wolf with my fatal, foolish little riding-whip? I can never forgive *myself*!"

"You seem determined to be quits," he replied; "I could find much to say in answer, but I am appalled by finding you here, now that I look at you more closely! Surely, you are not fit to have made such an effort!"

"In spite of my pink gown?" said Rosamond, laughing.

"And in spite of your pink cheeks! Let me take your hand. There, I knew it! Your pulse is going like a railroad. *Please* let me help you upstairs!"

Rosamond was astonished.

"You really were born for a doctor, as you say," she exclaimed. "But all the same, Mr. Grant, I am here, and here will I stay! I trust to your kindness not to betray me."

"You own I am right, then? Very well, say nothing; but it will make no difference. Here is Thorne, whose eyes will detect your real condition at least as readily as mine have done."

Rosamond half raised herself as Richard came in, and held out her hand in eager welcome, lifting her glad, shy eyes to his face.

Reginald turned away.

A moment afterward she was lying back on the cushions with cheeks as white as the fairest of her flowers, ashy lips, eyes full of a strained misery, a piteous wonder! What had happened? What had caused this strange, this dreadful change?

Richard had hardly looked at her! Richard, who when she last saw him had held her in his arms, chafed her lifeless hands, rained kisses on her lips and tears on her cheeks, now scarcely looked at her; barely touched the hand she had extended!

Had he spoken at all? She believed she had heard a few formal words, in a voice how changed! His face was set in iron sternness. His manner was full of embarrassment and restraint; and he had immediately turned and left the room.

Her spirit died within her. The others were busy. Nobody came in; nobody saw the pallor of her face, the hopeless calm of her manner; nobody knew of the gripping despair which clutched her heart with its relentless fingers.

She could hear their voices, — Henrietta's sweet tones and Reginald's happy laugh. What they were saying she neither knew nor wished to know. It would always be so now. She must always be apart; not even listening — not even caring! She must

watch the lives about her with listless indifference — she could have no life of her own !

She closed her eyes and feigned sleep when she heard steps approaching. Nobody must speak to her now ; she could not bear it. Her feint was successful. The room remained empty. She heard voices on the lawn, and from the window near which her sofa stood saw Mr. Heatherington and his ward walking up and down in close conversation, their forms outlined against the evening sky.

The wide folding-doors of the drawing-room were open, and through them she could see Henrietta standing irresolute in the hall, — waiting, perhaps ! She turned, and Rosamond saw her face. Such a light in her eyes ! Such a radiance of loveliness ! No need to tell who had joined her now !

There was plenty of light to show their figures ; there could be no mistake, no doubt. Rosamond lay among the shadows watching ; but where they were, all was bright.

She saw Richard take the beautiful white hand in his ; but before he could speak, — and he looked like one who had much to say, — Henrietta's lips moved. Rosamond saw him start, and listen with the most eager, the most rapt attention. A few rapid words and answers followed. Nita suddenly pressed her handkerchief to her eyes ; and Rosamond, with a bursting heart, raised herself on her elbow, and with no thought of honor, no restraint of shame, strained eye and ear in an agony of attention.

Richard was gazing at the lovely girl by his side with the most glowing, the most transfigured face! He still held her hand, and he now lifted it to his lips and kissed it fervently and repeatedly, and it was not withdrawn.

Rosamond sank back, and not a moment too soon, for they both turned and looked in her direction. She heard Nita say, in answer to some words of his, "Oh, no, *please* let me tell her myself! I have promised!"

A moment later she saw her cousin join the others on the lawn, and they were all shaking hands in hearty congratulation.

Then came the summons to dinner, and all was quiet in the growing darkness.

With a low moan she turned her face to the wall. What folly, what fatuity, to have come downstairs at all! Not to have crept away the moment they left the room! What vain hope had betrayed her, and robbed her of her one chance of escape? It was too late now. All her strength was gone, she could not rise to her feet.

How long she lay, desolate and wretched, she did not know. She was dimly conscious of a servant bringing a tray; and she reached out her hand for the glass of water, and could scarcely lift it. After a while she felt that she was no longer alone. Henrietta hovered about, stroked her hair, drew a covering about her, sympathized and grieved over her evident fatigue, and mourned over the untasted food. Then

she knew that the others were softly reassembling, gathering about the fire, talking in low voices lest they should disturb her.

A large screen shut her partly from their sight ; but they were distinct to her, where she lay. She noted the serene satisfaction in Mr. Heatherington's face ; she pierced her heart with the vision of Henrietta's maidenly sweetness and exquisite beauty, — the bliss in her dewy eyes, the smile on her lovely lips.

And Richard ! Where was now the grave, stern look, the absorbed expression ? A new light irradiated his face ; his form seemed to expand ; his voice had an exultant ring ! Tea was served, and carried away again ; and then Richard asked for a song ; and Rosamond heard Nita answer, in her shy, happy voice, "If Rex will sing too ! I think he will sing again now !"

There was a little ripple of laughter from them all at these words, which Rosamond did not understand. And then the two voices blended in such absolute harmony, such a very heaven of sweetness, that the trembling listener behind the sheltering screen felt that her heart would break. Nobody could see her there ; nobody would know that her face was wet with tears. Under the shield of the exquisite music she might even let a low sob escape from her overcharged heart to her lips.

Suddenly her hand was taken — pressed — kissed ! She looked up, with dimmed sight, to see Richard on a seat beside her, looking at her with happy eyes.

It was more than she could bear. Why could not he give her time? In mercy, only a few hours, a few minutes, to put from her all her folly, — to bury it deep, and stamp down the turf on its grave? Why must he seize this one moment of her prostrate weakness to parade his happy love and demand her sympathy?

She snatched her hand away and hid her face, while tears rained down between her interlacing fingers, and her frame was shaken by a storm of noiseless sobs.

“Rosamond, dearest, darling!” he whispered, “what is it? What troubles you like this?” His voice was full of the tenderest entreaty, but it suddenly faltered, and he turned white to the lips.

“I never thought of *that*!” he said, with a groan. “Is it indeed so? My dear one, are you bearing *that* sorrow? Oh, be brave, be patient! It will pass like a cloud, and you will be yourself once more!”

What did he mean! *He too!* Had he seen her heart? Was he counselling her for her own good? It was too much. She braced herself for a desperate effort. With eyes blazing with indignation, and with rigid lips, she turned to him: “Explain yourself, Richard, if you can.”

He was looking at her in the deepest sorrow and anxiety. “Once before I mistook you utterly, Rosamond. I hope I am equally mistaken to-night.”

“Let the past go by,” she said, with a disdainful wave of the hand. “What do you mean now?”

"Forgive me, dearest! I ought not to have spoken; and yet if my fears are true, my words are true also." He glanced at her pallid face and dilated eyes, and went on: "You have a brave heart, Rose; a resolute nature. If any feeling has been awakened — any fancy — which you know now can never be returned — Oh, my sweetest one, how could I let it happen? Sometimes I feared it — but I little knew. You have, as I said, a brave heart, my Rose, a resolute nature — call upon them now! You will conquer!"

He could not meet the fixed, stony look in her eyes, and stammered on —

"One word more; for, whatever you feel now, some day this will comfort you. There has been no blame. No thought of this ever crossed the mind of — that other! His hopes have been long felt; his love given long ago. His attentions to you were from warm admiration — all unconscious of harm.

"Great heavens!" he groaned, as she still looked at him without moving. "What an ending to my happy evening! And it is my blindness, my self-absorption, that have done it all!"

Rosamond felt that her strength was gone. She could not even withdraw her eyes, or the hand which he had again taken. She made one feeble effort to rise, to free herself from this intolerable, this unheard-of insult, and fell back unconscious.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DOUBLE DÉNOÛMENT.

HOW she was carried to her room, and who had tended her, Rosamond neither asked nor knew. She struggled back from her long swoon to a sense of hopeless ignominy. She saw her heart laid bare, to be scorched by pity and contempt. Her life lay before her like a wrecked vine, every blossom withered, and every foolish clinging tendril wrenched away. She vaguely felt that somebody was caring for her and nursing her, bringing her back to warmth and life; but she grudged the care, longed for darkness and oblivion, put away the tender hands that were helping her, and made no answer to the gentle words that addressed her. Henrietta, puzzled and anxious, never remitted her efforts, and till late in the night was constantly by her friend's bedside; but scarcely a word passed between them.

By morning Rosamond had rallied. Her forces now were pride and despair. Hope was dead. Love was scorned, but life still must be lived through to the end, and at least her secret might be guarded from the world about her.

The thought of Richard counselling her to overcome her attachment to him, dwelling on his own guiltlessness and the vanity of her dreams, brought such a sense of faintness to her heart that she could not face it. She put it away with all the strength of shame and sorrow. If such thoughts could enter his mind, such words pass his lips, her idol was shattered indeed! She dared not dwell upon it.

But one fact must be faced, one other effort lived through. Restless with the weariness of heart and body, Rosamond could not endure the restraint of her bed or the monotony of her chamber. She rose, and with Ruth's aid managed to get through the fatigue of dressing and to move to the sitting-room once more. The pink wrapper had again been brought, and unconsciously she put it on. Rosamond had not given it a thought, nor did she know how ghastly she looked in contrast with its delicate rosiness.

Henrietta joined her, full of solicitude and kindness, but with a new timidity of manner. With sudden remorse Rosamond realized that it was the result of her own mute ingratitude and repelling coldness of the night before. How wretched, that in her misery she should have wounded that innocent heart, thrust aside that tender hand, perhaps even implanted in her gentle breast the sting of a suspicion only too near the truth! With a great effort she braced herself to her duty, and taking Nita's hand,

said softly, "My dear, you look as if you had something to tell me."

A flood of beautiful color rushed over the sweet face, and loving eyes were turned upon her.

"Dear Rose, I know you will be glad that I am happy at last," she said simply.

Rosamond lifted her face to kiss her.

"It has been so long — so long!" said Henrietta. "Sometimes I felt I could bear it no longer. But when he came back," she stopped and put up her hand to her swelling throat.

"Yes, I saw," said Rosamond gently.

"You *saw*? There was not much to see!" said Nita, smiling. "It was nothing new, you know. We have loved each other so long, and only waited for papa's consent. You do not know papa very well, Rose. If he once says a thing he never goes back; and it is a pity, for sometimes he says very hasty things. Of course this marriage was what would most please him; but he had said, long ago, that I should never marry an idle man. He insisted upon some profession or business."

How far from an idle man her cousin always had seemed to her, Rosamond thought.

"But now it is all happily arranged, and the long trouble is over. He can perfectly well attend to the editorial work here in summer, and we will spend the winters, as we always do, in New York. It has not been *his* fault, Rose, that the engagement has been so long delayed. You know it is

really very hard for a man to choose for himself a thoroughly congenial career when no necessity pushes on the decision."

"Yes," said Rosamond; and thought sadly, "Poor Thorncliff! Louisa may have it now!"

"Not that I cared about it; it was papa," went on Henrietta. "Dear Rose, I am so glad to tell you my secret at last. I asked your cousin last night to let me tell you myself. He has been so good, so kind! It really is all his doing, Rose."

"I never doubted it," said Rose, wonderingly.

"And oh, it did me good to hear with what admiration, what appreciation, he spoke of Rex! It positively made me shed tears. I shall never forget it."

"*Rex!*"

"That is what I often call him, you know. Have you not heard me? Oh, Rose, you have only seen him with the constraint of this half-acknowledged engagement hanging over him, and the fret and misery of thwarted wishes and undeserved reproof. It sent him away this winter. He could not bear it; and he went, although I felt as if my heart would break without him. Then came papa's sudden desire to have this paper started. It was an idea originating with Reginald, and he never doubted, when I wrote about it, that he was to take hold and make it his life work. He came to the North immediately, to find the place given to another man. Was it not hard?"

Rosamond could not speak.

"He has been so restless and unhappy since his return that he has not seemed like himself at all. All his old happy occupations were laid aside. He would not sing, because his heart was so heavy. He would not paint; he locked up his studio, and turned all the pictures to the wall, because, Rose, the pictures were almost all portraits or sketches of me. And through it all, though it has made him almost morose and irritable, he has loved my father so tenderly, and nursed him so devotedly. Do you wonder I am happy now?"

"But," faltered Rosamond, putting up her hand to her brow, "I am confused; I do not understand. What did you say about an editorship, Nita? What has that to do with Mr. Grant?"

"Did not Richard Thorne tell you that he had given up the place?" said Nita. "That is the secret I have been keeping for this past week and hugging to my heart, Rose. He asked my advice about it the very day of the ride; at the very moment when you dashed by us, we were deep in the plan. It was such a kind, such a wise thought of dear Mr. Thorne. It seems he only took the position on trial, and found it did not suit him at all. Through it all, you know, I have never blamed your cousin. It was not his fault. He knew nothing of our wishes and expectations; and both Reginald and I have admired and esteemed him highly, in spite of our disappointment. But, Rosamond, don't you see

yourself that he never would have succeeded? He was not born with a literary gift, I think. I have always thought his real bent was for politics, like his father."

Rosamond gave her a startled look; this had always been her own secret ambition for Richard.

"And it was his urgent request that won my father over at last," Nita went on. "It has all been arranged during the time that you have lain so quietly in bed. I could not tell you until all was settled. Yesterday was such a happy day to us all; and in the evening I told your cousin, myself, the whole story; and he was so kind and so glad. Rose, dear, all that I need now is to know that he—that you, are as happy as we are. That is what Rex longs for too, for he is very fond of you; and oh, my dear, when you know him better you *must* love him. He has the most devoted heart! His nature is as beautiful as his face. Wish me joy, dearest, for I think nobody ever was so happy as I!"

Rosamond smiled dreamily. "Joy indeed, joy indeed!" she murmured. "Kiss me, my sweet!"

Henrietta embraced her fervently.

"How selfish I have been, talking so long and tiring you!" she said. "Rest now, dear Rose; and I will go away, and give you the chance."

She softly closed the blinds and left the room, and Rosamond sank back upon her pillow in an utter suspense of thought and feeling.

She could not rouse herself to take it in. She lay still in a sort of trance of calm, unbroken by any movement of body or sensation of soul. She was only conscious of a burden lifted from her spirit; as conscious as if that spirit, disembodied, had crossed the stream of Time and felt its yoke removed by invisible, healing hands.

Long she lay in this stillness; then suddenly in one great heart-throb the blood surged through her veins with a force which made every pulse tingle. A step came along the hall; it paused; she heard a knock at her door. She could not hear her own voice answer, but the door opened slowly, and Richard said, "Did you say I might come in?"

How grave, how sad he looked this morning; and last night his face was like a bridegroom's! A sudden resolve came to Rosamond to know, to understand; to clear these mysteries, these perplexities, at whatever cost of mortification or sorrow. Life could no longer be endured without such an explanation.

He began by an inquiry for her health.

"Better — well," she said briefly. "Richard, before we say another word, answer me one question, truly. What did you mean last night?"

His face was deeply troubled.

"Will you try to forget my words?" he said. "I see now that they were cruel, unpardonable."

"Never mind all that. Of whom were you speaking? What did you mean?"

"Of whom could I possibly be speaking but of Reginald Grant? How could I help perceiving your emotion, as you watched the scene and saw the truth. Why will you make me say it again?" he said bitterly.

Rosamond sank back. To her pale cheek the blood rushed back in a burning wave.

"Yes," she said; "I watched the scene, but, Richard, I did not see the truth. You mistook me utterly."

"I rejoice to hear it," he answered gravely. She saw that he could not believe her.

"I never, *never* thought of him and Henrietta together. I was blinded. I forgot his existence entirely."

"Of whom, then, were you thinking?" cried Richard, starting up.

"What else *could* I think?" said Rosamond. "I saw your face transfigured with joy! I saw you kiss her hand!"

"You saw *that*!"

"What could I think, but that your happiness had come at last? And if," she faltered, "in my weakness and illness I was selfish enough to feel that the last of my brothers had deserted me, you must forgive it, Richard. You know I never did like to be a Rose without its Thorns," she added with a piteous attempt at a smile, as she recurred to the old childhood's pun.

Richard sat frowning in deep thought, then said

In his quick, masterful way, "Rose, one thing is certain; this must be made clear between us. For Heaven's sake, let us have no reserves, no misunderstandings now! You say my face was transfigured last night, and you never guessed why? How shall I make you see the truth? Let me tell you all."

Here he paused in deep thought; Rosamond lay almost panting with suspense.

"Dear, I have been like a person in a dream, who has reached out gropingly for some longed-for prize, and waked to find that it lay close beside him all the time, while he had never known it; but, oh, Rose, waked perhaps to the truth that he never could reach it now!"

She said nothing, but looked at him with dilated eyes.

"How shall I show you," he went on, "that from first to last my whole heart has been full of you, and of you alone? When I was first attracted by Miss Heatherington, and in my miserable, conceited imagination 'tried her on' as a possible mistress for Thorncliff, I see now that my real thought was to make it again a home for you."

She shook her head slightly, but put out her hand in gratitude. He took it and held it fast.

"I admired her greatly; who would not? When she sang, I was transported into a new world of feeling; but you know, of old, how I am influenced by music. At other times I felt nothing stronger

than regard and admiration ; no overmastering impulse ever drew me to her."

Yes, she had known that all along, thought Rose ; but she could not speak.

"When you spoke as you did that first evening in New York, you startled me," Richard continued. "But I put the idea aside. Then came her father's marked kindness and attention, Charley's reproaches, Louisa's plans. Once or twice I was even ass enough to imagine there was a new look upon her face, — some blush, some smile different from former ones, and that they might be meant for me."

He flushed painfully. Rosamond softly said, "Don't bring yourself in guilty of folly and vanity, dear Rick ; I saw it too."

"Kind little comforter !" he said gratefully, and kissed her hand. "You see we were both mistaken. Neither blush nor smile was for me, thank God !

"I began to think," he went on, "that in my folly I had committed myself, and had shown a degree of devotion which was far from my true feeling, and a degree of attention from which I could not honorably draw back. If that were true, — if it were possible that I had aroused expectations — wishes, perhaps — Rose, I cannot go on. I feel such a contemptible puppy when I say such things."

"Skip all that," she said, smiling. "It was perfectly honorable, intensely upright ; but it does not bear putting into words."

"You always understand," he said, "and you can imagine how little the future attracted me, when I saw that it involved giving up home and independence, and bearing many things which might prove unbearable, even while I never yet dreamed what was the real longing of my heart. And then came that moment, while I was still jogging blindly on, playing with fate and the future, and your white face suddenly went flashing past me, your lips set in the determination to control your horse. In one instant all thought of Miss Heatherington vanished from my mind forever. When I saw you lying lifeless on the bank, the revelation came like a lightning-stroke to my heart, that, living or dead, you were the only woman I could ever love!"

Rosamond hid her face.

"I do not know what I did or said," said Richard; "but the madness was brief. The knowledge of the truth was followed instantly by the knowledge that it was too late! My honor was bound, my fate was in another's hands. I must put the dream from my heart and do my duty. I went away immediately."

"Oh, Richard, did you never think of me?" said Rosamond, reproachfully.

"I may truly say I thought of nothing else. I busied myself in getting rid of this hateful editorship, which I felt would only add to the perplexities and troubles of the future; and then I came back

here, resolved to do a man's part. Imagine my revulsion of feeling, when, before I could speak a word, or commit any new folly, she — dear, noble, beautiful creature that she is! I believe in my heart that she knew what words were trembling on my lips — asked me to listen to her; told me the story of her long attachment and its joyful ending; and thanked me for having secured to her the happiness of her life. No wonder I was transfigured! No wonder I kissed her hand! I was in the seventh heaven of relief and delight!

"There is my confession," he ended, looking at Rose with smiling, penetrating eyes. "Now it is your turn. Rosamond, be so kind as to answer a few questions truly — but when were you anything but true? Whatever you say, I must believe you. Last night, why did you suffer so much? Why did you faint?"

"Oh, never mind; please let that pass," pleaded Rose. "I was weak, I was morbid; I have been ill, you know."

He sat frowning, in an endeavor to recall the scene, and took no notice of her entreaties. Then, with a new light breaking over his face, he exclaimed, "Rosamond, of whom could you think I was speaking, if not of Reginald Grant?"

"I never thought of him at all!" cried she. "Oh, Rick, please do — do change the subject!"

She burst out laughing at her own absurdity.

"My dear," he said, "this subject must be made

perfectly clear before it is changed ; and then I hope, I trust, I shall not wish to change it. It seems incredible ; but did you, *could* you think I was speaking of *myself* ? ”

“ Please forgive me,” she said humbly.

“ You could think that ! ” he cried in amazement. “ Oh, Rose, Rose, after all these years you could think me capable of *that* ! What do you deserve as punishment ? You owe me a lifetime of expiation ! No wonder you fainted with horror.”

He stood over her, looking down at her tearful, blushing face, where joy was struggling with shame ; then, suddenly stooping, he gathered her in his arms.

“ Richard,” she said faintly, “ what does this mean ? ”

“ It means a great many things ! ” he said. “ It means, Rose, my Rose of the world, that if I am not wrong again, mistaken again, the light that fills all my nature has sent one little ray to your heart as well.”

She put up her hand and caressed his cheek.

“ Richard, my king,” she said, “ wrong as before ! mistaken as before ! The one little ray is a whole flood of sunshine ; there is not one dark place left in my heart.”

He kissed her again and again in a transport of happiness.

“ It means, for another thing,” he said, smiling down at her blushing, happy face, “ that when I am

really engaged to a lady, I do not content myself with kissing her hand!"

Rose was both laughing and crying.

"Oh, it means that, does it?" she said. "Put me down, please, Richard! I don't know whether I am awake or dreaming."

"So that is the reason," he cried, "why I was so absurdly jealous of Windom, and then of Grant. How blind I was! I remember Charley called me a dog in the manger. Why did not that enlighten me?"

"Think of Charley and Nelly at Thorncliff, and how astonished they will be!" said Rose. "And, oh, Rick, think of Louisa's disapproval! Not a fortune like her — not a beauty like Eleanor! Nothing but poor little me!"

"Rose," he said, "you are *exactly* like my mother! No other woman could fill her place."

She put up her face for a kiss. No compliment could be so great, however undeserved, no praise so dear as this. Then, with sudden mirth, she exclaimed, "Poor Mammy!"

"We will make the cottage into a Little Trianon for my queen!" he answered. "Charley shall have his new house close by. Louisa may go — to Jericho, if she likes! How blissful life looks! Thorncliff will have its mistress again. Oh, if my mother could only know!"

And then, after a few moments of tender silence, another arch smile rippled over Rosamond's face, and

she said, "But, after all, Richard, you have failed in the great object of your life. You will never marry a Superior Woman!"

"No," he answered. "I should no longer be content with that. You are Supreme!"



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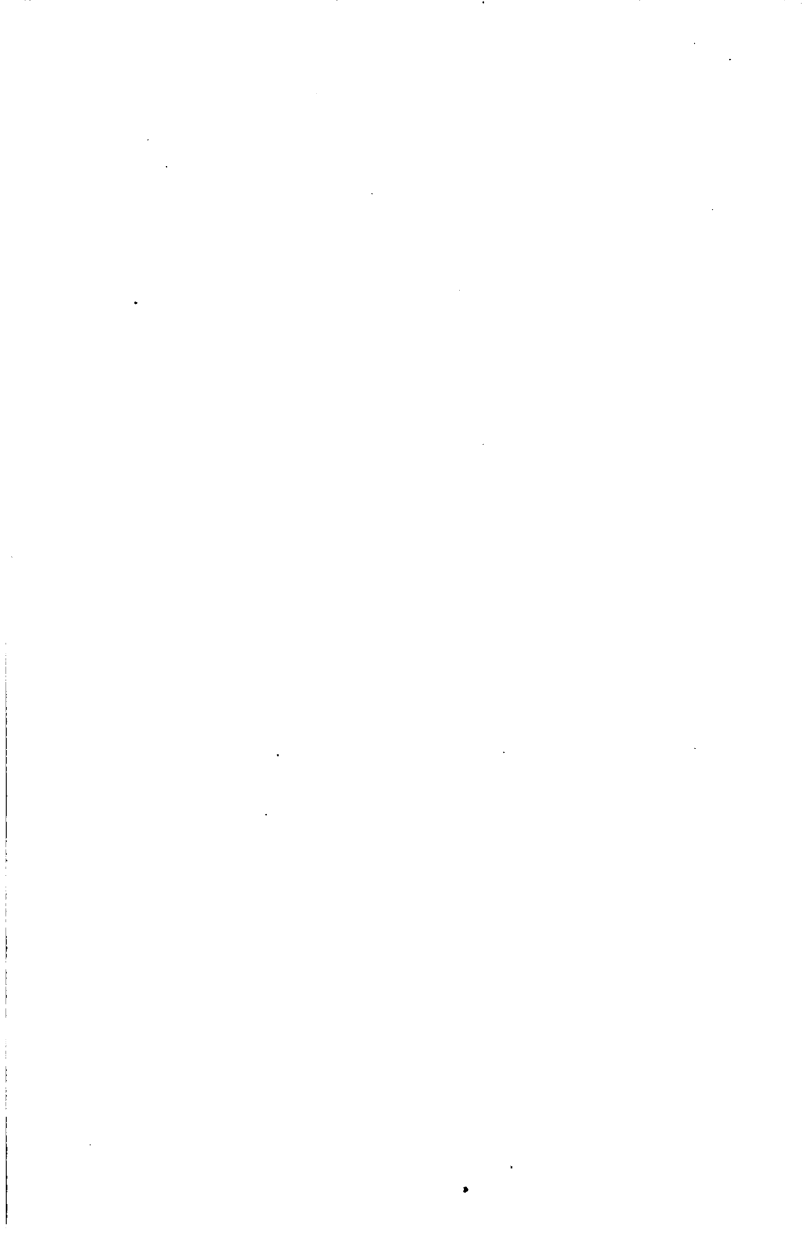
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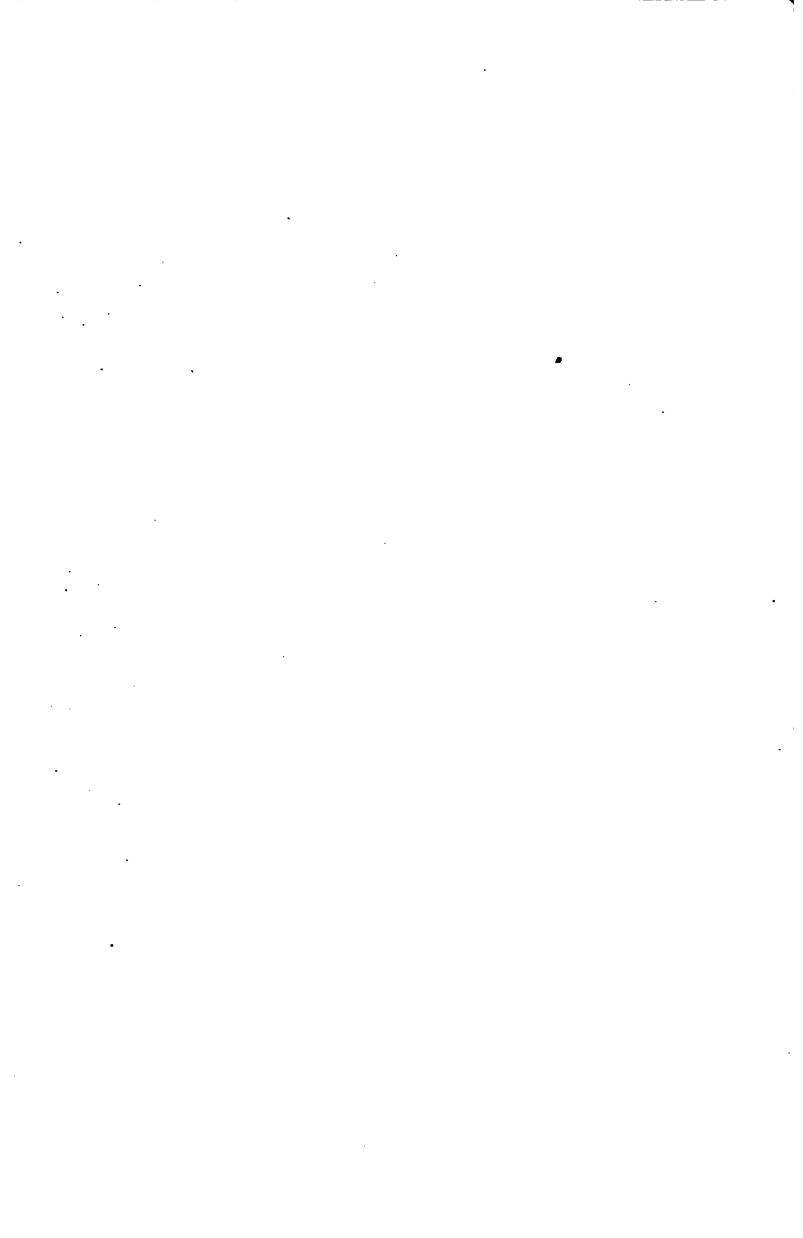
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